

The Years of Permanent Midnight

& OTHER UNEDITED ESSAYS

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Dystopian Manila

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For Wendy, Olivia & Ulyana.

INTRODUCTION

Musings from Dystopian Manila

A co-worker from a former employer told me during our training days that the infrastructure of his alma mater, De La Salle – College of Saint Benilde, stands in the middle between a busy, dirty street and a middle- to lower middle class community. He described me that as if it came from a dystopian science fiction. The only disappointment I had of him is that, he never worked on further thinking-through with these fictions.

But it is an interesting take: it is as if we are living in a Ballardian future: a future consisting of fictions of every kind. My co-worker's theorization of the dystopia came from the sci-fi notion of it, wherein celebrated "futuristic" architecture – not just DLS-CSB's

building, but every high-rise buildings – arrogantly rise in the middle of a deteriorating city. Monoliths are built in city centers which suck life out of the living majority. What was once a horrible metaphor of capitalism is now un-ironically celebrating capitalism itself. Perhaps, the bourgeois city becoming fiction, is capitalism being honest.

The dystopian monolith of privilege also makes an honest person of the working and the middle classes. The ruling class tries to ease us out of our anxieties. They tell us to fight depression. Perhaps, making us guilty for choosing depression and anxiety over happiness and inner peace. Little did they know that it is their expropriation of our living labor that makes us like this. That it is not really our depression that we're supposed to be fighting. Our depression is our reaction in our depressive states. It is right to be depressed as much as it is right to rebel. It is them, the ruling class, who made us like this, who we're supposed to be fighting. Their fear of us recognizing these is why they shower us with pseudo-science support hotline and DaVinci Resolve high contrast LUT templates.

In this dystopia, happiness as a default set-

ting and mission can only mean two things: either you're too privileged or you're already reprogrammed. I forgot what it is called, but there's a kind of psychological condition which happens when one is staying too long in the dark. Perhaps, it is in the dark that you are being reprogrammed. What more if you work in permanent midnight?

Carlo Cielo, the writer of *Year of Permanent Midnight*, the film, do not really expound on the concept. Ironically, the film is set on Daytime. It is probably the eve of it. As a concept, permanent midnight owes its theorization to that sensual quality of a long night. The film is set on years when globalized outsourcing of English-speaking middle class was just starting. It does not fall far from Mark Fisher's *Slow Cancellation of the future*. But in a not surprising manner, no matter how cringey it is looking back, the cancellation happened in darkness. Disappointingly, we're now living in cyberpunk.

It's only 18 years into the 21st century. While the first decade does not seem to work in stasis, the second decade's developments accelerated on speed we failed to catch up on. In the Philippines, if not in the rest of US

Imperial lands, the earlier part of the second decade of the 21st century marked the return to neoliberalism after the years of war against terror. War on terror was replaced by the impersonal war of drones and biological warfare. The US-Aquino administration need not make biological weapons to launch a biological warfare: it is enough for them to neglect its working class for the benefit of its oligarchy and elites to inflict civilian casualties. Intensified campaigns against the working class was launched by imperialist support which brought permanent midnight in the urban zones, while launching air strikes against indigenous people's communities in the rural zones. US-Aquino administration brought us lasting biological and psychopolitical effects, and has zombified a portion of our population on many extent.

Reaction came later in the 2nd half of 21st century's second decade. With fascism supporting bourgeois economics, neoliberal psychopolitics appease the masses while tearing them apart piece by piece. Bodies dropping from maladies inside and violent oppression from outside. Meanwhile, the specter of the US-Aquino administration haunts the nation

through the screens partially fulfilling desires. Dystopia reigns through actual violence and numbing new age feelings.

The ridiculousness of historical developments surpassed the ridiculousness of body-horror fiction. What are we now are raw materials for that ridiculous liberal media's bible of the times, *Black Mirror*. Science fiction, which meant to put-off its audience from the ridiculousness of bureaucracy, of new age thinking, of liberalism, of capitalism, is now in the same vein of the ridiculous. It's barely science-fictional anymore. What *Black Mirror* does is to reframe what's happening in the present with very few imagination and just appeal to the affect, like in advertising. Visual cultures in permanent midnight carry over more the practices of Public Relations. Cinema, as we know it, no longer exists.

Perhaps, Steven Shaviro is right: we're now in a post-cinematic condition. Visual cultures, with its mastery of design, can no longer afford just to be spectacular. Besides, visual cultures are already too overdetermined to go back to the Meliesian spectacular cinema of Magic. We don't even look now in *per spectiva*. In permanent midnight, the eyes no longer

sees. It substitutes another sensual function: it feels.

The post-cinematic condition is a visual culture of touch. A visual culture of nerves. Electricity directly flowing from our fingers to the screen. It makes sense that we're more accustomed now with touch screens than cinema screens.

Cinema persists, as an undead creature. In the cancellation of the future, it capitalizes on nostalgia. As a response to the touching eye, it capitalizes to films that expresses, instead of films that show.

Outside the cinema houses, real authoritarianism recreates cinematic spectacle of the old through showers of blood and gore. Ballard's fictions of every kind are being practiced from executive, legislative and the judiciary. Cinema, safe guarded by liberal values, tolerates by insisting on their nostalgia and expressions. Responding to the seemingly macho violence of the state, is a Pink Film Festival, also funded by the state through a Local Government Unit. Liberal cinema, in permanent midnight, responded fiction with more fictions. Remember those "creative documentaries" of 2016?

Liberalism acts as a politics of mediation. Mediating between authoritarian forces and the economics it safeguards. Tolerating actual deaths and hunger for the successes of speculative numbers of GDP and GNP. It is honestly opportunistic. It is concerned of the discomforts, but if these discomforts became sources of creative inspiration, it tolerates it. Liberals protest, but only in principle. Liberalism is more concerned with maintenance than progress. It maintains the permanence of permanent midnight.

Midterm elections are coming around. Post-cinematic politics also flow in the same way as cinema in permanent midnight: as nostalgic regression and as appeal to the feelings. Revalidation of political dynasties by questioning whether it categorically exists. Liberal candidates run, posing as cultural representations of the marginalized, while actively supporting actually fascist campaigns of their election opponents.

Meanwhile, the worker in permanent midnight, guilt-tripped with happiness, are being declined of escape. Death drive, which is supposed to be the radical force to force through barriers, is being demonized as decadence

while actual decadence are being practiced by those who spread guilt. Vampires indulge on your blood through your scars while telling you that to kill yourself is selfish. Suicide, your final reclamation of the self, is being taken away from you. In permanent midnight, it is impossible to die with your own hands.

An idle hand is the devil's playground. There's a gun, but they tell you, you can't point it to yourself. Ever thought of pointing the other way?

This collection is a result of waking up on nights longer than expected. Despite the darkness, deadlines persists. Despite the dread, work needs to be done. The collection is mainly concerned in the period Philippine History and its remnants in recent times which violence often overlooked by the overbearing media presence of Rodrigo Duterte. The US-Aquino administration, while not really far from the US-Duterte administration, passed as if it does not deserve any discussion in history. It started and ended with impunity. Its ghosts haunts with the computer-generated

responses of automated social media accounts which shames the faults of the past administrations. Being powered by non-humans, the violence of the US-Aquino administration is often dismissed by anti-Fascist media intellectuals who themselves are quite distant from actual violence.

The titular essay, “The Years of Permanent Midnight: The Liberalist Construction of the Philippine Nation” was one of my many attempts to raise into discourse the past administration through its manifestations in the moving images. It was produced under those conditions of writing during long nights. Past the working hours, while the family is asleep. First drafted as a class paper, a shorter version of the essay was presented at the 6th Philosophical Association of the Philippines Conference, where nights spent at Naga were used to fill in time for an outsourced “home-based” job which I was hired to work for a month.

“Surrendering Ourselves to the Dark Lord” was supposed to be an inquiry on The Witch and other recent horror films’ tendency to provide a more effective cinema: one which delivers spectacle more effectively than art-house. Upon seeing Hereditary, a new insight

happened on a more political sense. The essay attempts to survey the ideological deployments of different film cultures through the representations of evil. The essay was submitted on a journal, as of this writing, there's still no update on whether it will get published.

"Killing Fields of Vision" went through several revisions already. It's just this set of rants where an initial version of the thoughts which can be read on the other essays were written. It was published on the 5th issue of UP Cinema's Kino Punch magazine.

"Laruelle's Hell" is an unfinished draft of a paper which was supposed to be submitted on the inaugural issue of Oraxiom: Journal of Non-Philosophy, with the invite of one of its editors. The essay never made it on time. It is an initial attempt to think through Francois Laruelle's thought and his system which is called "non-philosophy", or more recently called "non-standard philosophy." It's an attempt to try to negate non-philosophy temporarily. Now I'm thinking, it's not oraxiomatic enough.

"Against Happiness" and "Discomfort and the End of Experimentation" are both first to appear here. "Against Happiness" is an almost

a year-old draft, which I never really get to sit and think through until recently. It was supposed to be a kind of media-theory relating neoliberal campaigns of positivity with visual cultures. “Discomfort...” on the other hand, is a personal reflection on the “experimental”, partly relating to one of my film production.

The choice not to edit (proofread) the whole collection isn’t an artistic statement. It’s a practical approach. It’s less motivated by a point than of a practice of lazy attitude to avoid re-reading more than twice or thrice. The choice not to have the collection proof-read presents quite a contradiction: I’m eagerly writing and selling this object on a language which I never really had mastery of. I never really tried to resolve my lapse on grammar. I never really deliberately make mistakes: these are honest mistakes. I am betting with unintentional handicap here: hoping that my point will cross despite of my non-mastery of the English grammar. Maybe the next edition, if money will allow, I can hire some decent proofreader to do it for me.

Another reason why I chose not to have the collection proofread, despite of the insistence of some, is because of this impatience I have.

A behavior which is probably reflected on the writings. The essays are driven by fear, among other things. The essays are written on the run, fearing obsolescence. Neoliberal technocapital recodes signifiers, events and every other element of what remains of human life faster than expected. Fear increases the day would come in the near future (if ever futures are still possible), the conditions are far worse than what I wrote?

I do not see this becoming an intervention. Logistically, I can only distribute few copies at a time. And I can't do this all the time. I have an employment to retain. This will remain in the fringes, if not in oblivion. Overshadowed by permanent midnight's darkness. I don't really fear failure. We're already past that.

But, I felt the need for this to be out there. In the wilderness. In the concrete jungle. Despite being in places I hate, like from where you bought this, at least it has reached a place where I won't be.

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THE YEARS OF PERMANENT MIDNIGHT

The Liberalist Construction of the Philippine Nation in Cinema under the US-Aquino Administration

The Liberalist Construction of the Nation

The film *Year of Permanent Midnight*¹ opens with a young man and a young woman talking about the conflict which caused the split of the progressive student organization at the University of the Philippines during the 1990s where the film is set. On a later scene, we see the two persons knocking at a condo unit. They are welcomed by another person who later introduced the audience to their activity: hacking into a financial institution to digitally steal money. In this instance, the student-movement conflict that was being discussed earlier no longer rings in our ears. Instead, the wired room flattened the conflict into a singu-

larity: it becomes a film about exploiting the hole of the then early global financial market. What seems to be an imbalance in writing made sense as a symptom of the early digital age: the time when globalization is gaining a heightened momentum.

This essay treats the Philippine nation in the logical sense of this momentum: the Philippines, being totally wired to the global market, can never be grasped or even imagined correctly outside this circuitry. Several factors are to be considered: the acceleration of global capital, the heightened need of the global community for outsourced Workers (both as manifested to the fruition of the BPO industry) in the 2010s – both are supported by the intensification of the liberal culture and politics of the US-Aquino administration. The Philippine nation is imagined in this essay in the same manner as the film mentioned above, only in its more mature iteration. With this, the manner of the national-construction which lead to the nation being imagined only through and by globalization, as mentioned above, was enabled by liberalism.

The liberalist construction of the nation does not differ in imagination than that of a

globalist one. The liberal thought is founded on the notion of “openness,” much like globalism, which aims to “encompass ever greater numbers of world spaces” which is thought to lead towards further “integration and interconnectivity”² between nation-states. This integration and interconnectivity is never going to be possible without the methods of liberalism such as “everyday political negotiation consisting of various civic and cultural referents.”³ Lisandro Claudio, in his book-length defense of liberalism through an intellectual history of its deployment in post-war Philippines, sees liberalism more as the backdrop (in his words, “blueprint”) of the country’s overall composition. While he keeps mentioning that his “liberal heroes” have had a hand with economic-policy making, he did not perceive liberalism’s blueprint also working on the economic level. He viewed liberalism generally as a polity – in his terms, a polity of possibility and openness.⁴

This openness manifested in Philippine cinema through a new variation of production popularly termed as “maindie”. The release of CinemaOne Originals’ commercial breakout film, *That Thing Called Tadhana* (2014), indicat-

ed its first full realization. Rolando Tolentino identifies the period leading to 2010s with the “mainstreaming of independent cinema” as a practice, which has become prevalent on the latter part of 2000s.⁵ What was before in the periphery of cinematic market is now at the center of discursive and practical approaches of both the affirmative and critical sides of the film scene. Big and small studios alike banked into producing or distributing similar works – and most gaining same reception – as *That Thing Called Tadhana*.

I would like to look at maindie as the site of the liberalist construction of the Philippine nation in cinema. A construction which do not just happen politically or culturally, but even more so, economically. Kojin Karatani considers nation-formation as something which can also be located in economics: “[...]the nation is an “imagined community,” but it is not a mere fancy or fantasy; it functions as the imagination that mediates and synthesizes the state, [its apparatuses] and market society.”⁶ He would further argue that the existence of the nation economically differs from the general conception of the nation-state founded in commodity-exchange. He suggests to look at

the nation as enacting reciprocal exchange.⁷ But I would argue, however, that what Karatani is suggesting here can only be possible on nations which did not went through a history of colonization. To look at the Philippines as formed through the logic of exchange, being a post-colony presupposes that we look into the uneven exchanges which set out the current condition and disposition of one nation. Unlike Japan, which was founded more in the dominance of an internal warlord, postcolonial nations like the Philippines was dominated from the exterior, hence, the conditions by which a nation's economics, politics and conditions will differ since the source of hegemony came from somewhere else.

What I'm agreeing with Karatani is how the nation is imagined through exchange, albeit, an uneven exchange on postcolonial nations. With this, I'm offering a hypothesis: the nation is imagined through the formation of a national-subject. Under conditions of dominance, like ours, I'm arguing that the nation is imagined by the ruling class through a projection of themselves on others. It is in this instance that the symbols of nationality become important. The national-subject is construct-

ed through its interpellation with the use of the national symbol.

But come 21st century, the dependence on national symbols has depleted. As instantiated with *Heneral Luna's* (2015) epilogue where we see a CGI Philippine Flag burning, with its conscious rejection to subject itself into any symbol, the imagination of the national subject becomes different. In a time when disbelief on national symbols or when the “framework” of the nation has been shaken, Karatani suggests that “empire” or world capitalism was being “referred to as an alternative principle to the nation.”⁸ This is not to say that the nation is being dissolved in this sense, but as exclusive exchange within the geopolitical boundaries are becoming harder to imagine, the sense of having symbols of nation is being treated as too “closed” (i.e. fundamentalist), openness to globalization is a feasible alternative for the liberalist logic. The task then, for maindie cinema as the site of liberalist construction of the nation through its subjects, is the construction of subjects which would definitely see themselves as part of this globalized imagined community. The subject, then, of a nation constructed under liberalism must

be someone who believes in tolerance and openness, effaces the need for symbolization (which includes identification of one's self in a contradiction against, or in symbolization through labor,) and firmly believes that even though the system is not perfect, it is still the best one he can have and there is no alternative for it (this nihilism is also one which is needed to be tolerated). The subject of a nation constructed under liberalism must be one which absorbs all these negation of symbolization and still performing/contributing to its economy through its conscious participation to commodity exchange: the modern-day cynic.

Faced with the challenge of taking-on globalization in the discourse of the liberalist construction of the Philippine nation in cinema, I see it fit to look into the work done by Jonathan Beller in his theorization of the world-media system as the framework of the economic base responsible for the reproduction of globalization in cinema. Beller takes from Guy Debord's "spectacle" on his theorization of the world-media system.⁹ For him, the world-media system "names the organizational protocols that simultaneously struc-

ture culture and economy.” He further adds that these protocols also engineer the perception through machinations of what passes through both faces (repressive and ideological) of state apparatuses. The world-media system produces the “dominant network of abstractions that would organize all social processes in the service of capital.”¹⁰ World-media system’s mode of social organization take from the appropriation of global capital of what he calls the cinematic mode of production: cinema, for Beller, reproduces social life and subjects through the deployment of cinematic techniques.¹¹ Reflecting on Louis Althusser, Beller would posit the reciprocity of this mode of production into the political: the mechanisms of the cinematic mode of production reproduces the subject “not only through wage labor [and the alienation of it] and the necessities that can be purchased with wage, but, psychologically, as it were, through a process [Althusser] called as *interpellation* – the calling of worker-subject into being by ideological apparatuses.”¹² (Italics added)

Since we are considering cinema’s deployment of nationalism in the light of the cinematic mode of production, we are assuming

that nationalism is indeed, an ideology. In a way, as Althusser would put it, nationalism can never exist in any other form but through apparatuses.¹³ The national symbols as embodiments of the nation has themselves legal origins and implications – the law as an ideological apparatus. Cinema, being the site of liberalist construction of the nation, is considered also as one of the apparatuses through which nationalism, being an ideology, exists.

Reproduction of the Nation

As discussed in the earlier section, this essay perceives the construction of the nation through the construction of the nation-subject via the exchanges they encounter. In this sense, the construction also of subjectivity becomes important. The source of this subjectivity in its origin, however, is impossible to trace, as this also became a product of exchanges throughout history of the formation of the subject. As Jacques Lacan would put it, subjects “relay with each other in the course of intersubjective repetition,”¹⁴ presupposing the formation of the subject has always been in a manner of exchange or, in Lacan’s terms,

of discourse.¹⁴

This is where I came to break with Karatani's model of nation being imagined through reciprocal exchange and came with a different model fit with the Philippines' history of colonial dominance. Intersecting with Lacan is Benedict Anderson's reframing of the formation of the collective subjectivities which has led to nationalism "with consideration of the material, institutional and discursive bases." The bases, as Anderson would like to suggest, generates two contrasting types of seriality: the unbound and the bound.¹⁵ It is on these dialectical model that we can perceive the nationalist subjectivity came to be through its exchanges via the serialities generated by the material, institutional and discursive bases. The challenge here, and what is being addressed on this section of the essay, will be to locate cinema's place on those bases.

These bases that Anderson talks about are the various apparatuses in operation in the deployment of ideology. Its bound-ness, so to speak, can be considered as an effect of the operations of these apparatuses. On these complex network of apparatuses in operation, cinema can be found on one of its segments.

Althusser identified a “number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions.”¹⁶ He called these the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). Among these “realities” are the cultural ISAs where we can locate cinema functioning as apparatus. But, in the light of globalization, cinema in the 21st century, can no longer be considered as merely cultural (in the manner that Althusser considered cultural ISAs as institution separate from the trade and communication ISAs). Starting in the 20th century, under capitalism, culture is already being captured by the economic to function as economic mediation. Beller further expounded:

“Culture, then, has been recast and reprogrammed by the acculturated who, at every level of the socius, labor under the heliotropism of capital and its leveraged exchange. This capitalization of action, thought, the unconscious, and desire, among other bio social functions, is otherwise known as commodification.”¹⁷

It is in this concept that we completely break from Karatani and consequently return to Marx: of reconsidering the commodity exchange as a framework of rethinking the exchanges that happened in a nation which history of uneven development speaks a lot of its formation and construction. In the light of globalization, the repetition, distribution and the mimesis then of ideology – of nationalism – can never be but in the form of commodity exchange.

Cinema as an apparatus, can be said to appear as a specific form of ideology, among the complex of apparatuses by which ideology also appears to. The appearance of ideology in cinema is specific due to its specific form: the ideology is in the formal quality of the films. This form, of course, is determined by the political-economy which informs its content. Nationalism, being the content interrogated in this essay, also appear as such. But in the age when the nation's framework is being shaken, nationalism in this sense, take an alternative principle, and that is of "Empire" or as Karatani would note it, of "world-capitalism".¹⁸

Negotiating with Empire

Since the notion of the “nation” is being uncomfortable – that is, the nation in the traditional sense of a closed economy in the realm of geopolitics, the recourse of liberal economics is to open itself to the global market. In the process, the effacement of any symbolization that would refer to the old nationalism has become a necessity. And in the process of exchange, it expects to produce a subject who is also open to this.

Cinema, in this sense, become paradoxical in its operation as apparatus: what is to be represented (since cinema mostly functions through representation and suggestion) if it aims for less symbolization? If it is the “traditional” notion of the nation that will be erased from representation, if not, “nationalism” itself, what then is to be done with cinema? It needs to have another object – another ideology – to represent. This was resolved by a new sub-genre in romantic comedy, which is *hugot*.

In an earlier study I made, I identified the ways of which hugot films succeed on reproducing ideology through the repetition of the

dialogues uttered by the characters into the films' visual plane.¹⁹ The "hugot" in the film do not remain exclusively dialogical (i.e. it's no more a compendium of "hugot lines"), but is being repeated as a spectacle. What this signify in the context of the nation is that, what replaces the symbolizations and significations referring to anything that has something to do with the nation and nationality are being replaced in hugot films by seeming representations of characters' frustrations.

For instance, in *That Thing Called Tadhana's* opening sequence, we see Mace (Angelica Panganiban) unloading her bag to clear her off the excess baggage weight at the exit terminal of an airport. Mace justified that it is heavy because it contains the totality of her life ("dala ko kasi buong buhay ko dito"). The things which are "the totality of her life" – what's she removing from her bag – are mostly things which suggests that reminds her of her former partner. In another scene, Anthony (JM De Guzman) tests Mace if she can still carry the bag while crossing a pedestrian over-pass. Mace said to Anthony that she still can and she doesn't need help ("kaya ko"). The bag which burdens her was suddenly left behind while they go for

another trip to somewhere.

The same film-language is applied in *Ang Kwentong Nating Dalawa* (2016), on one of its heightened confrontations. In a scene at a bar, Sam (Nicco Manalo) tried to talk things through with Isa (Emmanuelle Vera) on the state of their relationship. While Sam signaled with a hesitant silence, Isa tried to shift the topic over the script she's writing for their screenwriting class. Isa, with an angry look on her face, read the some lines from her script to Sam. The following is the exchange which took place between the characters, which highlights the displacement of their conditions towards another aspect of the film as a means of its repetition:

Sam: Sorry. Kanina, para pala akong bata. Ang dami ko lang kasing realizations lately. Ako. Ako lang naman yung may problema sa 'tin, eh.

Isa: Uy.. Gandang line nun ah. Salamat, pwede ko bang hiram para doon sa character doon sa script ko, si Mark? Ok ba? Pa-consult nga pala. Baka gusto mong basahin yung script

ko, kaka-print ko lang bago pumunta dito. Pwede?

(Sam looks at Isa in silence)

Isa (*cont'd*): Tignan mo tong dialogue dito... Yung dialogue ng babae. Tignan mo kung sakto lang, kasi pakiramdam ko ang cheesy eh. Ito: “Parang ayoko na rin. Paulit-ulit na lang kasi tayong ganito since naging tayo. Kung nahihirapan ka, Mark, mas nahihirapan din ako. Kasi nag-titiis ako. At gawa ako ng gawa ng paraan.” Cheesy, ‘no?

At the end of the film, it is revealed that Sam is actually Isa’s instructor for the scriptwriting class. As Isa submitted her screenplay project, Sam browsed through the script until he reached the part where it says “Wakas” (“End”), immediately reached out to his pen and erased the word.

What is happening on both instances cited above can be said to be a repetition of the frustration into another filmic element form the dialogue. This repetition – a *hypersignification*, in a sense – becomes in itself, an avoid-

ance for anymore signification. The frustrations repeated in the scenes persist as the only significant part of the story: it begs to be taken as it is. The films “speak to [themselves] about [themselves], without discrepancy.”²⁰ What is to be expected then, if we are considering this repetition as avoidance of signification as a mechanism of the state cinema-apparatus to re-produce ideology and the subjects that it forms? Such formations identify the subject who is one which external contradictions are no longer a pressing matter, but all that must be resolved are exclusively personal. Beller stresses on this kind of signification as a kind of “flattening” between depth and signification where “[a]ll of the would-be contradictions, yesterday’s contradictions, are on the surface, and since there is nothing but surface they are no longer contradictions.”²¹

What does this overdetermination of signification do? Beller calls this as “capitalized mediation” wherein all of the signification’s spatial and metaphysical properties were “sublated by capital logic.”²² Beller suggests that the images produced by these mediations, by highlighting its overloading of signification, are less of signs but are commodities.

The filmic subjects (i.e. characters) disappear and become themselves bearers of exchange-value/use-value logic. This is exemplified by the way the characters relate to each other. Mace and Anthony met and mostly form their relationship on their trips (by which are not for free). The same goes with the girls of *Camp Sawi* (Viva Films, 2016) and *I'm Drunk I Love You* (TBA, 2017). Camp Sawi itself is an actual getaway lodge and their relation to the Camp Master is basically just one of the services offered by the resort. Most of the interactions in *I'm Drunk I Love You* happened not just over alcohol, but also on places where hyper-commodification happens (bar and the music festival). Isa and Sam, being student and teacher from De La Salle – Saint Benilde, inevitably has their relation placed on a hyper-commodified environment: from their school cafeteria to the bar where they hang out.

Complementing the elimination of depth is the “annihilation of laws and boundaries that have, in the past, delimited the movement of the signifier.”²³ These functions, in the films above, through the films’ elimination of the characters’ identities as workers by setting the films in the time when work is

at rest: vacation, trips, graduation. What the characters do for a living in those films are mostly being talked about in-passing, some in detail, but never really bear any significance to the progress of its narrative. We are left with nothing in the films but to trust the characters whoever they say they are.

In *That Thing Called Tadhana*, the film is set at the time of the characters' arrival from a foreign country. They talked about careers, Mace told Anthony about a "career she gave up" so he can go to Italy and live with her former partner. Anthony talked about wanting to be an artist. But since the setting of the film was in their vacation, nothing can be seen which proves that Mace and Anthony are who they say they are. In *Ang Kwento Nating Dalawa*, most of the film is set on class-breaks and after-class. There's one sequence where Sam was seen sitting in a classroom, but eventually left. Their identities as laborers — student and teacher — was only used as a plot-twist in the end. But the twist never helped forward this dynamics, but rather, pushed further the discourse of the affection (or the impossibility of it) between Sam and Isa. In *I'm Drunk I Love You*, it is mentioned through dialog that Car-

son (Maja Salvador) is a social welfare student and Dio (Paolo Avelino) is a film student. But since the film is set comfortably on their days before graduation, not to mention, their La Union vacation, we can't see them doing any student-like activities.

This leads us to the discussion of the subjects constructed through the characters of the films mentioned above. What kind of a subject can be produced if we are to combine the removal of any form of collective identification, such as nationality, class, work-force into the mirroring signification? What can be produced from the negation of presence? To clarify, there are still representations in the film-image of the subject, only this representation is being determined by a negation of anything that can be said to be "traditionally" symbolic. The symbols relating to any collective identification are being replaced by a highly individualistic character on screen. One of which identification is still symbolic, but only in the form of commodities.

*The Liberal Nation-Subject:
The Modern-day Cynic*

In the last sequence of *I'm Drunk I Love You*, we see Carson and Dio drinking in front of a store. Dio is still wearing his graduation get-up, while Carson already has changed her clothes. The scene, taken into the context of the film, do not really close the film in such a manner that it is being resolved. The seemingly open-end does not quite have that tone. Instead, the film, even from its beginning, sets itself in a certain distance as such that it can only be taken "as it is."²⁴ If so, it is an ending without an end. It is incapable of imagining such things: it does not resolve the loop that Carson is trapped in in the shadows of Dio. It does not propose any exit for Carson. Rather, the film does not seem to believe that there will be any.

While not being a perfect manifestation, the end sequence of *I'm Drunk, I Love You* can be seen as a symptom of what Mark Fisher identifies as *capitalist realism*. The concept of capitalist realism can be explained in summary using the idea of the actual resort in *Camp Sawi*: the camp participants all went with the

hope of moving on, only to prepare them for another round of falling in love. Camp Sawi, the resort, locks its participants on the loop of moving-on and trying again. If not now, maybe, as the words Gwen (Arci Muñoz) and Bridgette (Bela Padilla) gave a toast to at the end of the film, “someday” (“balang-araw”). The notion of love – and the preparation, moving on from it – is what is being commodified by Camp Sawi. Like most of the relationships on the films mentioned on this section, this lock is nothing more than a lock to capitalism. What happens here is that the belief of love is being collapsed into a ritual/loop or symbolic elaboration that “all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics.”²⁵

Capitalist realism has a cynical tone to it. As Fisher would put it, “capitalist realism presents itself as a shield protecting us from the perils posed by belief itself.”²⁶ By belief, it means any other speculation outside of the capitalist logic. Capitalism, as Fisher would extend it, “brings with it a massive desacralization of culture”²⁷ which, in effect, actively and forcefully “deideologize[s]” the filmic content. As Edel Garcellano would put it,

deideologization is “at the heart of liberalist hermeneutics.”²⁸ These desacralizations and deideologizations effectively brings the subject in a cynical distance between things, and should supposedly bring reason onto a new enlightenment through doubt and towards “objectivity.”

Peter Sloterdijk referred to cynicism as an “enlightened false consciousness:” the term false consciousness used here is the same when Engels²⁹ referred to it as the consciousness which is at operation in the process of ideology. Sloterdijk would insist, however, that cynicism is itself an heir to the enlightenment through its critical engagement with it: its critical engagement with enlightenment is precisely its fundamental nature. Cynicism constitutes “a consciousness afflicted with enlightenment that, having learned from historical experience, refutes cheap optimism.” It “scarcely allow itself any hope, at most a little irony and pity.”³⁰

Sloterdijk’s description of cynicism places the cynical subject in a position of awareness. Slavoj Žižek would expound more on Sloterdijk:

“The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: ‘they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it’. Cynical reason is no longer naive, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it.”³¹

Capitalist realism, in this sense, can be seen in the light of cynicism that insists upon the mask of capitalism for its defense. If we refer back to *I'm Drunk, I Love You*, we see the same attitude if we perceive Carson and Dio's relationship as a metaphor for this. Carson knows too well that it is the vagueness of her relationship to Dio that's making her miserable. Dio is quite aware too. But they both insist on supporting each other's enjoyment at a certain distance.

Cynicism further empowers liberalist openness: since a cynic does what it does despite knowing what it is he's doing, he proceeds to but with a certain distance, which on most cases, leads to its own complicity with capital. Such is the case of a significant part of the Philippine independent film culture. Fisher would claim that the "establishment of settled 'alternative' or 'independent' cultural zones" such as the independent film scene, do not really "designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact the dominant styles, within the mainstream."³² These zones and scenes may be considered themselves as the cynical spaces of film production which, if given a certain amount of time to mature, will be open to mainstream cooptation.

Maindie, being a site of liberalist construction of the national subject, is also the site of cooptation of the independent scene by the mainstream. And so retains itself parts of the cynical attitude it bears from its beginnings. For instance, in the film *Apocalypse Child* (TBA 2015), Ford (Sid Lucero) know too well that what her mother said who his father was is ultimately false, her mother knows too well too,

but they continue to live the made-up story. The maintenance of this false consciousness is important to have them all go on living out their desire. It is this false consciousness that became their standard for living.

Cynicism opens negotiations with this violent, oedipal tyranny. Claudio's defense of liberalism only places its position to aver anything that is deemed extremist. In his own words, liberals "are willing to compromise." That being said, liberals have this "willingness to get their hands dirty" which "lands liberals in the halls of power."³³ But what of non-totalitarian violence? Claudio can only give "moderation" and "tolerance" as a response, since the greatest liberal pursuit is *modus vivendi*. Since for him, there is a necessity for a "politics of mediation."³⁴

This politics of mediation is apparent also, in *Apocalypse Child*. The end sequence of the film is a mediation between the tyrannical father's legacy through Rich (RK Bagatsing) and the orphaned Oedipus, Ford. Instead of condemnation, a pragmatic response can be heard from Rich's resolve over the history of abuses from his father: after all, he's learned a lot from his father and his abuses ("marami

akong natutunan sa kanya”).

In another film, *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* (Epicmedia/ Sine Olivia 2016), a postmodern re-imagination of Jose Rizal’s *El Filibusterismo*, one of the characters, Padre Florentino (Menggie Cobarrubias), is telling Isagani (John Lloyd Cruz) to forgive Simoun (Piolo Pascual) of his past mistakes: to forgive Simoun of his initial collaboration with the Spaniards since, as Florentino would see it, he’s trying to make up for it. Isagani is insisting that he shouldn’t at first. But after sometime of staying with Simoun at Florentino’s hut, Isagani started to doubt his resolve. In the end, he asked Florentino that if he’s forgiven, what would happen to the effects of his action to the revolution. Why do things need to end up the way it is? All fundamental questions pertaining to Simoun’s actions’ effects to history. Florentino left the answer to Isagani (“kayong mga nakababata ang makakasagot niyan”).

There are two things that are being mediated here: first, is the actual violence done by Rich’s father to him, defending it for its supposed pedagogical effect; second, is the violence done by Simoun for the liberation movement, which is being defended by incor-

porating Isagani with Florentino's appeal for forgiveness. Cynicism here as a political mediation displaces violence from its systematic and institutional origins to a mere personal approach: "it subverts the official proposition by confronting it with the situation of its enunciation; it proceeds *ad hominem*."³⁵ Michael Neu noted that these moderations perceive such violence as just, and hence his collective concept for these kinds of violence as *just liberal violence*. "The liberal framework," according to Neu, "is obsessed with individuals [but are] blind to social hierarchies and interconnectedness."³⁶ What is being forwarded as a replacement to institutional critique is an extreme moralization: "a fixat[ion to press] the complex material world into a binary moral structure of right and wrong."³⁷

It isn't surprising, from this context that one of Maïndie's most successful film in terms of box-office, *Heneral Luna*, wrap itself up in the notion of the assumption of individual agency as the largest perpetrator of the nation's demise and not its colonizers. On confronting the cabinet and the President, Antonio Luna (John Arcilla) remarked the following statement as a response to the sentiments of

the businessmen at the meeting: “May mas malaking kaaway tayo maliban sa mga Amerikano: ang ating sarili.” (“We have a greater enemy than the Americans: ourselves.”) Preceding sequences suggests the justification of this statement to mean exactly what it means: there are no instances in the film of American violence against the Filipinos, war is depicted as a dignified and highly coded activity. At the end of the film, Luna was “executed” at the grounds of Aguinaldo’s backyard. What sets the tone which supports the earlier quote isn’t the execution itself, but the montage of subjective scenes which includes Americans laughing at the audience (addressing them as Filipinos) for “killing their finest war commander.”

In the very last instance, cynicism brings about a highly individualized look at the formation of history. Since the cynical subject doubts any institutions to actually affect his or her life, the blame is placed onto the individual’s agency alone. Neu places this reactive agency as the agency “to act rightly regardless of awful things can get.”³⁸ But the object here of “blame” isn’t one’s agency per se, but rather the individual subject himself. Mark Fisher

would refer to this mechanism as responsibilisation. It is the tactic wherein “[e]ach individual member of the subordinate class is encouraged into feeling that their poverty, lack of opportunities, or unemployment, is their fault and their fault alone.”³⁹ It has become a dead-end for the cynic, since he no longer believes in institutions, the statement of Luna in the film can act as an overdetermination of his being: that indeed, him and only himself is the enemy.

The Nation under Permanent Midnight

Nick Dunn would remind us, on his reflection of the Nocturnal City, that “despite of the increasing homogenization of different places, it is important to emphasize from the outset that cities are not neutral containers nor aspecial.”⁴⁰ We can look at our cynics on the same manner: despite of their seeming homogenized existence, they can never be considered as anyone neutral. If anything, their liberalist orientation of openness and negotiation made them complicit with whatever the liberalist construction of the nation is being complicit to, in this case, globalization.

The third person in the short film *Year of Permanent Midnight* is the very manifestation of the cynical subject: he mediates between the global heist and the seeming unimportance of the conflict that the other two characters bear. He instead, due to his distrust over the two as representative of institutions, helped himself on getting most of the exploits of their heist. His reign over the two marked the start of their life under permanent midnight.

Permanent Midnight, the reign of the liberal thought over the country's culture and political economy. The cynic as a product of the liberal-construction of the nation, is also a historical product of the country under liberalism. If as Claudio would like to claim, that we've had a long history of Liberalism – as old as the mid-19th Century – it is then that our production of the cynic as the nation-subject is something that the country is historically determined to have. This can only be intensified with the acceleration of globalist capital. The cynic is the product of liberalist negotiation to globalization. The years of permanent midnight has finally realized itself in this era of global capital being mediated through everyday negotiation of liberal values.

In a nation under permanent midnight, literally, everything becomes possible as long as it is within the bounds of liberal and capitalist negotiation. Even violence is somehow permissible, but the validation – whether a certain kind of violence is allowed or not – does not come from the subjects but from the ruling class. The 2016 documentary *Sunday Beauty Queen* is witness to this. In the film, the subjects are captured most of the time on their day-offs, either preparing for or participating at the beauty pageants organized by the Filipinos in Hong Kong as charity events. While the subjects themselves are revealing how is it hard to live as domestic worker in Hong Kong, even some of them getting rid of their employment but unable to get back, it would only take one statement from one employer, who happened to be a film producer in Hong Kong, to justify all these violence that the domestic workers experience: “without the domestic workers, Hong Kong will not be as great as it is now.”

The nation under permanent midnight, being at the excess of darkness, shrouds the structures which takes root of its conditions. Cynicism, ironically, as a guiding light, is blind

of the structures. He is entrapped by a global mode of mediation. Beller notes of the role of the world-media system: it constructs a subject whose humanity, “under globalization,” is “enjoined to produce its own nonexistence.”⁴¹ The subject produced by the liberalist construction was abjected of his symbolic existence, and was left out as himself a mediation between commodities. The cynic, the subject produced by the liberalist construction of the nation, is also the perfect consumer of the global market.

The production of the cynic as a national subject, as mentioned earlier, can only be possible on a specific time. This time is covered by the films read for this study. It is the time after all the trust in institutions are displaced towards technology. The mainstream-indie-liberal politics connection traces back to the perceived beginning of the so-called Philippine New Wave. While independent film production has always been historically a practice in Philippine cinema, commentators, as Tolentino would suggest, traces the roots of the “movement” at the beginning of Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival in 2005.⁴² What sets this movement against older indepen-

dent film practices is their use of the digital technology as medium. Lav Diaz identifies the Digital Technology as “liberation theology”.⁴³ In earlier writings, Khavn dela Cruz also sought the coming of digital technology as something which is positive for the artist and even assumes a “democratization of filmmaking” which enables the filmmaker to “shoot [his/her] opus in any [video] format.”⁴⁴

Technological determinism on the part of earlier practitioners of digital filmmaking is very telling of liberalism in a way that the coming of the digital technology also assumes that one is now free to do whatever he wants on whatever way he wants with the medium. For some time, the practice remained true to its political economy: dela Cruz and Diaz both have their own production outfits making their own films on their own time. Eduardo Dayao saw the movement back then as something similar to punk rock.⁴⁵ But like punk and its offshoot, grunge, indies got easily coopted by the mainstream after some years. This is due to indies’ failure to sustain a critique of the mainstream: but this failure is not because of it not being conscious of its position in relation to the mainstream, but as Tolen-

tino would also contend, in his commentaries of the films *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank* (2011) and *Ang mga Kidnapper ni Ronnie Lazaro* (2012), that the indies are already aware that they are no longer in the age to assume any innocence of the practices (and excesses) that they appropriated from the mainstream, which is why a significant part of its earlier history were not dedicated to critique.⁴⁶

But, since the limit of discourse of the then independent movement is technologically determinist in essence, it fails to sustain a running critique and resistance to the dominating practice of the ruling institutions. The arguments of digital liberation are left open to negotiation since it is mainly grounded on the celebration of technology. By 2012, all SM cinemas in the country have become fully digitized,⁴⁷ which signaled a change, too, for mainstream studios to shift into digital filmmaking. From filmmaking in the periphery for friends and selected venues, practices of big studios trickled down to the independent scene to follow. Indie then, became an infantilized version of the mainstream studios.

As the great structures of power of the studio system managed to coopt the once-inde-

pendent digital movement, it too has become the vessel of dominant-state agenda and ideology. It isn't an accident that mainstream-indie exchange, or maindie, zeniths in 2014, at the middle of the liberal administration of President Benigno Aquino III. It is then that the political-economic environment at the time is ripe and made possible to imagine this kind of openness as attuned with liberal values. The US-Aquino administration boasts of economic achievements as reflected by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increase and revenue from IT-BPO industries.⁴⁸ The then-administrations' Public-Private Partnership programs (PPPP) was also highlighted as signs of confidence of the public and private sectors.⁴⁹ PPPP has extended towards cinema through Quezon City's Local Government Unit's establishment of its own festival, QCinema International Film Festival, back in 2013, which gives grants to filmmakers to produce films which will be premiered at the festival. The festival expands from just producing and exhibiting three films in 2013 to showcasing 38 films from both commissioned works to invited films from international and local filmmakers in 2017. It isn't just the QCinema-

filmmaker relationship which is reflective of PPPP, but also within QCinema. QCinema is being organized by a private studio, VPF Creative Productions, presented as a main partner. QCinema has opened a way for a budding studio, TBA,⁵⁰ to have most of its production be co-produced in the festival.

It should be noted, however, that despite of the “achievements” that the Aquino administration claims, the over-all economic condition has not changed throughout the country. The liberal and elitist policies of the Aquino administration have resulted to the intensification of what Amado Guerrero identified long before as “uneven and spasmodic development” in the different parts of the country.⁵¹ The Communist Party of the Philippines’ Central Committee would add: “[t]he illusion of economic growth in 2013 and 2014 is due to the heavy inflow of portfolio investments to the Philippine financial markets from the US and other foreign hedge funds. This kind of financial flow amounted to more than 60 percent of total inflows. The remittances of overseas contract workers and net inflows from exports amounted to a small part.”⁵² Ibon Foundation’s summation of their assessment

of the Aquino administration would support this statement:

“Even if FDIs increased and employment grew, jobs creation has fallen from 1.1 million in 2011 to just 638,000 in 2015. There has also been a 543,000 addition to the number of underemployed Filipinos in the same period, showing that there are now more temporary, low-paying and insecure jobs in the business-biased economy. Moreover, 63% of the total employed are non-regular, agency-hired, informal sector, or unpaid family workers. Wages have also been very insufficient: the P481 National Capital Region minimum wage, which is the highest across all regions, make less than half of the P1,093 family living wage or the amount needed by a family of six for subsistence. Aquino vetoed proposed increases in nurses’ salaries and the elderly’s pensions.”⁵³

In this complex history, the subject which is formed under these conditions is set into a

field wherein institutions, due to them either being incomprehensible or just outright elitist, can no longer be trusted. It is as such that most films also depicted it that way: on most hugot films, while agency are being considered, the individuals' fate is being left into the care of commodities to accompany the effacement of institutionalized values and identities, at least in representations. Intensified by most maindie productions' call for responsabilisation, like in *Heneral Luna*, the individual has firmly wrapped himself into the web created for himself. The nation which the liberalist construction would like to have is a nation which subjects prolong his own displacement from the collective identities he formerly hold, towards a new imagination of perceived "borderlessness." The liberalist construction of the nation places its subjects on an imaginary "independence" while being negotiated to be exchanged as commodities for the global market.



AGAINST HAPPINESS

This ad by Tanduary¹ reveals to us one thing: that all campaigns in-favor of the primacy of ‘happiness’ as the end goal of life, is global capitalism’s attempt to push for its self-importance in the service of its own maintenance. The notions of “happiness as a choice” and “doing what makes you happy” are just two of many textual forms of commodity fetishism. Happiness as the basis of humanistic satisfaction – of existential solution – in late capitalism, is a part of what Guy Debord identifies as “extensive campaigns [which] are necessary to convince people to buy increasingly unnecessary commodities.”²

There can never be a more insulting remark against the whole history of mankind than for

any person to ask whether or not one is happy with what s/he does for a living. Worse are those who only “do what makes him/her happy.” Workers has served all throughout history for the survival and development of the human species, and the pursuit of happiness has never played any vital role on any great developments and progress brought about by human labor. Global capitalism’s campaign for the primacy of happiness in human existence has brought about stasis in every aspect of life.

I do not deny that ideas pushing forward similar line of thinking has been existent before our time. The notion of happiness as the goal of life is as old as (if not, older than) sexual bigotry and colonization, similarly products of institutionalized dogmatism. Religion and pre-enlightenment philosophy (from east to west) has contributed a lot from this. Notions of “life goals” even from the time of slavery has served towards the maintenance of the dominant powers of their own time. Slaves in 2000BC Egypt are being led to believe that to serve the King brings to one ultimate form of happiness. Jeremiah 33:3’s promise of complete fulfillment in life requires for one

to “seek the kingdom of God” as his primary task in life. Illusions of total satisfaction and happiness has served a lot towards the maintenance of the relations among power holders and their subjects.

This brought us to the more recent history. In a similar fashion, illusions of happiness has served toward the maintenance of feudal and colonial order by making it seem that feudal and colonial domination are acceptable under the condition that people are happy. The opening sequence of LVN’s 1939 film, *Giliw Ko* plays in the same manner.

LVN’s anniversary film opens with a man in coat and tie, obviously an oriental, conducting a band. He later on introduced their next song, the folk song *Bahay Kubo*. The sequence cross-dissolved to another place, where smiling farmers are harvesting while singing *Bahay Kubo*, along with other songs. The dissolve places the colonial situation of the music room in-continuity with the rural feudal farm.

Dissolve as film mechanism, situates a continuity either in displacement or as a reproduction. It sutures narratives in a way an abrupt cut won’t: a cut merely acknowledges

the existence of the other scene, dissolve persists the past sequence to the next. The specific dissolve used in *Giliw Ko* is a persistence in space. An occupation. The seemingly different places of different colonial influences, topple one for the other as a continuation of the new colonizer's values. Unlike, say, on a Spanish *encomienda*, the workers of the new colony, while not being different in the conditions of subservience, are now happily singing while still suffering from the same colonial condition.

Happiness here, as an ideological mechanism distributed through cross-dissolve, was revealed to be of an American influence. The promises of liberation and free market places the worker on a strict pursuit of one's own happiness. And this, again, goes with the guilt of choice.

Going back to the Tanduay ad, wherein you are invited to choose to be happy. Why would marketers care whether you are happy or not? Campaigns for happiness brings about optimization: "The neoliberal regime deploys emotions as resources in order to bring about heightened productivity and achievement."³ We can say that from *Giliw Ko*'s opening se-

quence, as early as 1939, it is seen that the pursuit of [individual] happiness even among colonial subjects, is an effective way to extract surplus labor from the workers in a highly optimized way. This campaign for happiness, under capitalism, is paired with the guilt of freedom, wherein the subject is assumed to have liberty over his/her own actions, and therefore, totally responsible for his own fate.

Writing about his own depression, Mark Fisher noted on how one of the sources of mental distress would have been the tactic of resubordination deployed by the ruling class which he calls *responsibilisation*. “Each individual member of the subordinate class is encouraged into feeling that their poverty, lack of opportunities, or unemployment, is their fault and their fault alone.”⁴ The reverse can also be taken: that happiness is an individual responsibility. Or simply, happiness is a responsibility. On the flip side, then, if one is un-happy, the individual is to blame.

Neoliberal campaign for happiness came from its wider claim of historical victory, as evinced in the narrative of end of history. The pursuit of happiness, as an “unalienable right,” is an imperialist attack to actual individual-

ism. Of course, as ruling class opportunism come, older ideologies abide by this pursuit, may it be from old-age or new age pursuit of inner peace or conservative religion's fetishism of their ritualistic lifestyle. What makes it imperialist came from its legal source: it is the written aim of American democracy. The contradiction of the contents of capitalism is that it never really pushed for the emergence of the individual, but always of the consumer.

Consider the ghouls in the 1978 film, *The Dawn of the Dead*. All of them have character or wears different dresses, but all are swarming towards living flesh and making them undead. It has been mentioned on many occasions, but the metaphor of the zombie for the consumer society is still on point to this day. The consumerist pursuit of happiness, happiness which came from the extraction and expropriation of surplus labor from living workers, makes happiness an undead occasion. Expounding on this gothic reality is Karl Marx, who describes capital as "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."⁵ To be fully optimized, the consumer needs to be undead too, for dead labor to be

sucked more.

The undead experiences happiness in an indefinitely suspended time: since already dead, the undead do not consider anymore future. He lives in stasis: a time which “curv[es] back to itself.”⁶ Since it does not see an end, it sees a happiness which do not really fully satisfy. A never ending jouissance.

Such jouissance is exhibited in the Japanese animation, *Kokkoku: Life in Stasis* (2018). The family in the series found themselves battling their way out of static time, or what they simply refer to as stasis. To enter stasis, it needs to be triggered by one of the members of the family who can control a certain ancient stone. People who are unknowingly trapped in the stasis must struggle their way out by not being satisfied in the conditions of the stasis. You still need to desire to be home. If one finds himself helpless and hopelessly trapped in the stasis, he'll experience a sense of euphoria of being one with the place. This euphoria makes a monster out of that person: a kind of undead guardian which eradicates nuisances which threaten the order inside the stasis.

Since time never flows in stasis, the hap-

piness never stops. But, as exhibited by the guardians of stasis, even though time never affects them, they are still experiencing decay. Or rather, this happiness in stasis can only be possible if one is already on decay.

This happiness in *Kokkoku* is a happiness which came from a mystical manipulation. It seems to be an end goal, but this is nothing but a cultic propaganda. But one thing can be assured: since this is a manipulation, the source of happiness can be found and this validates the behaviorists' notion of emotions as merely responses to stimuli.

Developments in psychological science over the recent years has tried to dismiss the earlier models and sources of behavior with their fascination on hormonal imbalances. But if these dismissals are to be taken dialectically, these only validate the fact of the matter: that happiness can only be organically situated as response to a certain stimulus. Environmental aspects contribute a lot on the emergence of happiness out of an individual: one can only be happy if a certain stimulus responds to an already conditioned notion of what makes one happy. Hormonal phenomena can never be taken by itself. Hormones are non-

sentient beings, they do not act on their own with some reason that we can never fathom. They are an organisms' signal, which respond with the environment too. They are responses to different sources of happiness and enjoyment (or any other emotions): from simple ones to extreme ones. It is this very relative and dynamic aspect between the relationship between human physiology and psychology which validates the non-importance of happiness, or the pursuit for any other emotions, in one's life.

Public relations industry has fetishized these "positive" emotions to the extreme, calling to the desires of people to extract surplus labor from them all throughout the history of modern and late capitalism. Any attempts for a scientific and logical understanding of the nature of humans tend to be squashed by the opportunistic campaigns for us to buy unnecessary commodities in the guise of self-love. To be guided by this notion of pursuit of happiness is to fall into trap in the loop of capitalist desiring-production.

Isn't this the very condition why one is being micromanaged in the office? One on one coaching to know whether one is satisfied

in his work and how the management treats him. Despite the fact that even without this reassurance the worker producing labor under capitalism has his surplus-labor expropriated from him for profit, he can't complain if his boss is kind and treats him to a meal every now and then.

And then, there are teambuilding and personality development activities. Employers opt to develop the worker into the ideal employee. Byung-chul Han referred in length, and with accuracy, this mode of molding the worker:

“Neoliberal psychopolitics is always coming up with more refined forms of exploitation. Countless self-management workshops, motivational retreats and seminars on personality or mental training promise boundless self-optimization and heightened efficiency. They are steered by neoliberal techniques of domination, which aim to capitalize not just on working time but on the person him- or herself: all the attention

the individual commands and, indeed, his or her very life. Neoliberalism has discovered integral human being as the object of exploitation.”⁷

“You’re tired? Why don’t you take a leave then? I noticed you still haven’t touched your leave credits yet.”

Working during nights, treating daylight like nighttime sleeping, waking up at dawn, your body ends up lacking more than it should have. Permanent midnight sucks the life out of you. You arrive 20 minutes late at the office. You chat with your workmates during smoking breaks. Having over breaks. During the weekends, you wish you are somewhere but is too tired to go. The night dawns at you every single time. You took a leave from work: stayed home and never left. Only to go to work again, to accumulate leave credits. Your leave credits, aside from your antidepressants, are part of your healing:

“In contemporary American self-help literature, the magic word is healing. The term refers to self-

optimization that is supposed to therapeutically eliminate any and all functional weakness or mental obstacle in the name of efficiency and performance. Yet perpetual self-optimization, which coincides point-for-point with the optimization of the system, is proving destructive. It is leading to mental collapse. Self-optimization, it turns out, amounts to total self-exploitation.”⁸

You’re dead inside. No one is deader than a worker in permanent midnight.

Making you even deader is this guilt of imagined “choice.” You already drafted your resignation letter two years ago. Updating the dates every quarter. But still, you never submit it. You’re trapped in this imagined scenario of “will I be happy if I leave?” Happiness haunts you in permanent midnight as guilt, persecuting you for not choosing it.

The question lies not on the choices you’ve made but on the very choices made available to you. Happiness in late capitalism always comes in the form of consumer satisfaction.

It is always a happiness attached with bodily enjoyment and/or suffering, depending on one's quirk. The question "will I be happy if I leave?" comes with another question of "how will I live after leaving?," entrapping you to sell again your labor to another company, preferably with a more "enjoyable" income, to reboot the process.

Let's say, you left your work. An option is presented: to get hired again or "be your own boss." You chose the latter: you are now free from everything. Before your corporate life, you're the most creative person on Earth. So you've decided to sell your labor as a freelancer.

Neoliberalism capitalizes from this frustration on both freelance and corporate employment, only, freelancers are workers deterritorialized from the factory assembly line. Or the other way around: "the factory now seems to be dissolving into autonomous and subcontracted microunits that produce under conditions that are not far from indentured and day labor."⁹ After several job orders, the check needs to wait for some time. Your savings are running out. You're now experiencing the contradictions of working freelance: you may not

be tied to any institutions, but you seem to require to do more work than ever. For the sake of maintaining this freedom, you sell your labor to more people at the same time. You then get tired of your passion. It now looks less happier than expected.

It is in this insistence of happiness as the goal of life that process loops in the assemblage of capitalist production happen. Loop as a form is also the denial of contradiction. Loops enclose a process towards its self-production. Contradictions are unimaginable within the loop, which is why an abstract and immaterial thing like happiness, can be presented as goal of life. That any form of struggling is in the negative aspect of life.

The denial of contradictions and struggles make way for the possibility of responsabilisation. In the assemblage of capitalist production, the guilt of happiness tells you that nothing in the assemblage tries to get in conflict with you, that the problem with you for not being happy is that you do not go with the flow better. It also denies us of any logical and intellectual understanding of ourselves, in the sense that of an understanding which comes from an organized and scientific understand-

ing of ourselves in relation to the world. The greatest implication is that the pursuit of happiness denies us of understanding of our own condition since we're mostly concerned with working our way to be happy.

Which is why new age thinking is still prevalent even among so-called Christians. It isn't any wonder why most chapters of the Victory Church are comfortably located inside shopping malls. These churches serve as part of the assemblage of capitalist production in the "healing" process mentioned above. New Age (ironically called Born Again) Christian churches suppress any form of complicated and intellectual (actually human) thinking. They "destro[y] the human soul" and replace in it a "machine of positivity."¹⁰

Positivity, in the sense of feedbacks in this loop of assemblage, is "the elementary diagram for selfregenerating circuitry." Nick Land further expounded that "[s]uch processes resist historical intelligibility, since they obsolesce every possible analogue for anticipated change."¹¹ Positivity makes itself available not just as feedback but data inflow. Positivity escalates the stasis: it makes all exit impossible.

But happiness, enjoyment and desire are internal human phenomena. We can't totally get rid of them. It is necessary to salvage them, at least as generic concepts, which are parts but not determinant. A return to an intellectual and actual scientific thinking-through these aspects. We can resist this trick for now once we acknowledge that happiness exist as part of human life. It may or may not come, depending on the stimuli and the conditions that we're raised. We need to acknowledge the temporariness of happiness as a conditioned response. It is this demand that neoliberalism makes easy to fool people to choose happiness because it's comforting. Happiness as temporary can never be a goal. We can try to unite these from time to time, but, only temporary. The task is to know how to struggle out of these conditions: to be an actually independent worker without any form of dependence, not even a dependence on happiness.

DISCOMFORT AND THE END OF EXPERIMENTATION

Some Personal Notes on the “Experimental”

Subject: Qcinema Requirements

On Fri, Oct 6, 2017 at 10:42 PM Epoy Deyto <epoydeyto@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi,

Di ko ma-send yung text ko, so email ko lang as back-up.

Rating: R16 (?)

Genre: Thriller(?)

I do not really consider *Pixel Paranoia* an experimental film. Like Khavn,¹ I’m a simple man. Experimental is prototype 1. It may be trash. It maybe not. The prototype is yet to have any conventions. Not that it does not follow any conventions. It’s just that, the experimental product is always early to judge. It needs to be tested to see if it works.

I think it’s unfair to align an experimental film to an avant-garde film. Even avant-gardes

has their own learned and sophisticated conventions. An experimental work is always not ready to be seen.

The email above was sent with the intention of classifying *Pixel Paranoia* a thriller because of a simple reason: its conventions are closer to a thriller than horror. “Experimental” do not come to mind. When the website for the 2017 edition of QCinema was launched and labelled the film “Experimental,” I became confused: what of it is experimental?

Some sort of lazy thinking comes on most film competitions or film events with regards to that label, “experimental.” It seems that film events, organizers, and apparatchiks would just label “experimental” anything that they find uncomfortable. Most that would qualify as “experimental” in film events in the Philippines at times have a long history of convention and practices. The “experimental” is a work that has always been inspired by something.

Data moshing, for example. In history of motion pictures at least in the digital times, arbitrarily “destroying” the image digitally isn’t a new practice. If *Pixel Paranoia* is “experimental” it would mean that it is a prototype

of such, if that's what they mean by it being experimental. But it isn't. It took inspiration with JD Molero's *Videophilia (and Other Viral Syndromes)*, a 2015 film which was screened at QCinema on that same year.

I wouldn't really consider *Videophilia* too, as experimental. Something intelligent and stylistically egalitarian can't be experimental. Experiments are, yes, intellectual activities, but experimental products are irreproducible as much as they are disposable.

In this time of history, with the digital medium already made traces of imperfection and experimentation less and less apparent, perhaps, experimentation becomes an impossibility.

But it is not digital technology alone that made this happen. As early as the 80s, a certain impossibility of the new was dawning the world. The thought of Mark Fisher threads in this direction. Taking cue from Fredric Jameson, the first chapter of *Capitalist Realism* is titled: "It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." Fisher reflects on dystopian stories and disaster films, from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation of P. D. James' *Children*

of *Men*, wherein he defined the ideology (and aesthetics) dominating in late capitalism as that of non-thinking and non-belief of the new: “Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics.”²

The “experimental” then, in late capitalism is less becoming of an actual result of the laboratory trials and failures, but is more of a ritualistic repetition. An established signifier of some sort. “Experimental” designates anything that is sensually uncomfortable or unidentifiable in the first look. Since the dominating idea (and ideology) about things, most especially in aesthetics, are rubbles coming from the deteriorating and undead bourgeoisie, the criterion for uncomfortability and unidentifiability is what is uncomfortable and unidentifiable for the bourgeoisie.

But, a contradiction arises: aren’t patrons of “experimental” art the bourgeoisie? To understand this contradiction, we need first to understand how the value of an art work is determined.

Even in Modern Capitalism, an artwork’s

price has always been speculative. The price for a painting do not really designate anything of real value – that is, it does not reflect any exact exchange-value. Auction houses bloat the price of a painting through the willing participation of the bourgeoisie to inflate its bubble price. Another aspect which bloats the price are historical trivialities: whether an artist is part of such and such movements, or whether this artist does this or that during a certain point in history. At most, in practice, the price isn't about the talent: it is about how the art object make a patron's cock hard, figuratively speaking. Or not.

The mode of valuation in cinema, at least in the 21st century, comes from different sources of valorization. But, generically, are still modes of valorization. There's a range where we pay on seeing a film which is more or less standard. In the Philippines, it's going to be around 200-400 Pesos on regular screenings and 100-200 pesos on film festival screenings. Sometimes free. This price do not reflect on any matter a percentage of what the film actually costs in labor. Much as the film-product is already processed in several ways (from pre- to post-production), so is its price.

The labor expended on producing a film depends a lot on a very a structured assembly line. Often times, there can be no room for experimentation: the film being produced must at least express a tried and tested methodology which can be repeated and extract results similar or close to when it was first used, or when it successfully gained profit. Which is why genres and its conventions began existing through constant practice of techniques, which later on became conventions. The “experimental” only fit in this framework only in its developed form.

Cinema’s valuation is determined in practice by parties interested on the exploitation of the film-product. Exploitation in this sense is the profit gained after the seed capital has been recouped. Genre is important in this case: there are genres which can gain more once it’s exploited than other genres.

The “experimental” has no convention to be speculated from. It is in this peculiar sense that the bourgeoisie become attracted of this. An “experimental” film is valued from its own capability to last without being conventionalized. There is this peculiar attraction of the bourgeoisie and art patrons to these kinds

of “imperfect” works, in the same manner that bootlegs and demo recordings become a collectors’ treasure. So much so that a multi-billionaire like Martin Shkreli would actually scourge the faces of online markets and bid the highest for a demo tape of Radiohead. It’s a kind of jouissance. An attraction to dirty sex. In the same way that Sade would depict the aristocrats gaining pleasure from things and activities which in the first place are sources of displeasure.

The fetishism of the “experimental” comes from this fetishism for both Sade and Marx: a fascination to something discomforting.

An experiment becomes quite difficult in the digital era. All traces of experiment in your non-linear editing software are being effaced even before it was extracted as a draft file. The user is an active participant in the effacement of the experiment. The “experimental” becomes less a product of testing out and trying out. The “experimental” in the age of digital filmmaking is less of a “discovery”, it is not something new nor a product of accident. “Experimental” now is sensed as a product of deliberately producing an uncomfortable film.

In Patrick Campos' writing, the end of cinematic experimentation come when the independent filmmakers began making what he calls "bold experiments" which inevitably lead to an "interrogation and revision of popular and critical discourses on history."³ But in the whole of its writing, Campos do not really address the experimentation itself. Instead, he focused on the imagined "dialogue" the films he studied in that specific writing supposed to enable. He is not concerned with the act of experimentation itself. Which is why he fails a lot in his mapping where or when really does the experimentation ends.

Looking at filmmaking in social practice, we can say that the end of cinematic experimentation came when the act of cinematic production became detached from its science. The rise of the digital medium in filmmaking enabled more the personal and "artistic" modes of cinematic expressions. Most personal films are not attempts to experimentation, but are merely translations of feelings to the film-image. The autoerasure of experiments made digital filmmaking a perfect medium for self-expression.

It is necessary that modes of self-expres-

sion are complex and at times discomfoting. It is the only time that it will get personal, which would imply that those who have the privilege to delve into personal filmmaking have complex personalities. Only such time that these discomfoting forms become conventions in practice, either as an auteurist signature or an appealing form to replicate.

Discomfoting cinematic forms do not make a film more or less valuable. It is still, after all, a moving image. Its valorization, however, depends on external appraisal. On whatever the appraiser likes to see.

This is when the speculative formation of value became algorithmic. Patronship depends on knowing what the money holder wants. What he wants may be concrete, as in a specific formal property, maybe not. It is where you bet your cards. Which is why, in QCinema, for example, where I submitted my script for Pixel Paranoia, being dismissed for the first time and accepted the second only assured this fact: that on the second time, the right people has read the script. Not really saying that it was planned, but if I knew it prior to submission, I can actually plan for something which has a higher probability of

being accepted. For film-grant bodies, speculation of the value of a film comes even before the image has been produced. The selection committee determines which films are “worth seeing” or not. Experimentation does not have a place on this. What is accommodated is peculiar taste, and not actual acts of experimentation.

Given these conditions, to declare one’s work as “experimental” in the 21st century would have a ring of conceit in it. The only reason why I think *Pixel Paranoia* was labelled as “experimental” in QCinema’s website is due to a certain processing of its metadata: that I, the representative of the film’s production, has been gaining recognition from “experimental” film competitions. Again, a point on lazy thinking.

An experimental art, in the 21st century, is probably as impossible as producing the new. Especially, in a day and age when what’s valorized are these discomfiting forms heralded as “self-expression.” If anything, these discomfiting forms become the very epitome of capitalist ideology in contemporary film practice: a relocating and resuscitating of the dead auteur.⁴ It is perhaps a manner also of

self-valorization: exclusivity in access assures a certain status for the bourgeoisie's privilege to be reproduced. By doing so, patronship of "experimental" art, of self-expression validates that specific kind of production as marginally "value-producing."

Looking back at recent Philippine film history, it is these discomfoting film forms which placed Philippines on the map again of world cinema. But these can never happen without its dependence on critic and patron valorization and celebration of so-called new forms. Fast forward, it is with these discomfoting forms that more conservative content in Filipino films becomes more apparent.⁵ The conservative sift through these seemingly demonic discomforts in the senses. It does not surprise us then that even one of the former mavericks of the so-called Philippine New Wave reverts to conventional and conservative (-feudal) filmmaking, and does so with great failure.

The "experimental" then, unlike its more popular connotation of challenging conventions, now reinforces conventions through its successes in transition towards being a convention itself. The alternative, the indie, and

digital liberation theology never really made something to challenge the mainstream. Being rooted in the “experimental” digital practice, the Philippine New Wave, the root of all the lazy thinking of the experimental, failed to distinct themselves and in recent history, has trapped itself in the US-Duterte regime’s (through its cinema-machine operators, Liza Dino-Seguerra of FDCP and Teddy Co of NCCA Cinema Committee) campaign of *one nation, one cinema*.⁶

It is in this sense of the “experimental” – the lazy notion of discomfort cinema – that US-Duterte’s *one nation one cinema* capitalizes when it appraises what it calls “regional cinema.” It is not a proper representation for recognition that is happening in the “regional” festivals: it is still a curated exhibition. The curation, as process of valorization, tend to depend also to a certain kind of temperament. A boner.

Of course, they can’t be revealed of just having a boner. Neoliberal corporate social responsibility sinks in as these activities are being referred to as championing cultural diversity. This diversity bank on cultural representation alone: “The more people are rep-

resented culturally, [...] the less they matter politically.”⁷ More and more regional film festivals pop-up every year, both on the initiative of either local government units or private/individual connoisseurs, with the support of NCCA. The more that these representations being championed are becoming less and less of political importance, and more of a contributor to the many numbers of floating signifiers of cultural representation.

At the end of experimentation, the “experimental” becomes in itself a collapse. As a signifier for any discomfoting image, it stands for an authoritarianism which does not tolerate anything beyond what is accepted in the discomfort zone. Cinema as safe space involves discomfort but only if this discomfort is within the ruling class’ *jouissance*. Going back to Sade’s aristocrats, which Pasolini rightfully re-appropriates as figures of autocratic rule: the indulgence on sexual decadence while wearing a suit and tie, is not unthinkable. Perhaps, this is the only complimentary image: bourgeois liberal decadence and conservatism, the worst of both worlds, tolerating difference and discomfort, but only on the level that they actually find it appeal-

ing. If not sexually, aesthetically. This enjoyment is fascism.

SURRENDERING OURSELVES TO THE DARK LORD

Three Inquiries on the Devil
in the Digital Screens

*“Demonic untimeliness treats regularity
as something to be deterritorialized.”*

- Cybernetic Culture Research Unit ¹

All conservativisms in the production of moving image do not align properly when what is concerned is depicting God. God has been desecrated in films. Worse, personified. Even worse, humanized. God is in the most propagandistic of blatantly Christian productions, to animated tales of lost adventurers. The representation of God depicted in cinema is less for a contribution of its critique, neither an exploration of God as a concept in itself, but either a mere plot point or a narrative supplement.

The Devil, on the other hand, is a different issue. Since its invention, cinema has depicted the Devil as a kind of absolute: either as an absolute object of fear, or the source of

sin. To summon the Devil on the screen, even with *Little Nicky* (2000), always comes with a certain conservative attitude. Cinema only summon the Devil not to use it for its selfish gain, but it does so to within a certain moralistic ground.

Granted, as *The Exorcist* (1973) and all its other derivatives have shown us, the Devil is intrusive. The Devil is that unsolicited trouble that confronts us. By a stretch, the encounter with the Devil is an event: a point of no turning back. But the Devil problem in cinema is always resolved in a non-eventual manner. The Demonic untime is an anomaly with conservative time: we need to go back to our ordinary lives.

Contemporary horror films, adapting neoliberal cynicism and championing post-modern free market values, tend to repeat the process of retention of order, but with a more tolerating attitude towards the Devil and what he may represent in relation to certain cultures. The 21st century saw in the recent embracing of the Devil a kind of marriage between magical and mechanical conjuring of ghastly manifest in the Gothic Flatline where organic agency is not the case.² But the cyni-

cism and distrust to pin down what the Devil even mean in the 21st century do not really amount to any form of subversion, but a reproduction of its intrinsic values. Neoconservatism creates its own enemies, which in cinema, being conjured in the embodiment of the Devil, and killing it, to be able to capture more souls to summon more iterations of the same Devil.

Long Live Satan!

Seeing A24's *Hereditary* (2018) some days ago, especially after witnessing it through the end, made me think of all the other recent films I saw which includes the devil in its narrative. The recollection is of course, in comparison with the film I just saw on how it treated the Devil. In *Hereditary*, the devil looks more like an alternative, an escape, to the lifestyle of the family trapped in the Mother's traumatic episodes. As an alternative, the Devil becomes an interesting and a problem-ridden political figure.

In *Hereditary*, the Devil is as American as s/he is liberal. Conservatives would even agree: "The Devil is Out of the Closet and is a Liberal."³

Satanists themselves will not even try to argue: Satan, according to LaVey, “represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification!”⁴ The Devil himself is the pursuit of happiness. You can never be more American than that.

The Devil probably is in the same line of popularity, if not more popular, than whatever diety or God if we’re talking about cinema. Even in the early days of cinema, the Devil has been a source of spectacular fascination. Goethe’s *Faust* seem to have captured a lot of imagination that seeing it on stage isn’t enough. Georges Melies would even make a comedy out of it, complete with his usual magic antics and hand-painted film effects. Kenneth Anger depicts Satan and his rituals, through LaVey, in the same ridiculous antics as Melies, complete with cinemagick and shiny black mass.

Hereditary’s conclusion features the same allure for the side of the Devil. This allure comes within it an unconscious determination of the American value of pursuit of happiness, paraphrased in libertine language of gratification.

Much of the film’s last sequence’s ridicu-

lousness can probably be credited to the past histories mentioned of films above which treats the Devil in a positive manner. Rituals are always cheesy, even when you watch actual videos of Satanic rituals. The ridiculousness and gloss veil the intention: to implant the Devil's spawn into the world. The moment Charlie's (Milly Shapiro) soul was transplanted to his brother, Peter (Alex Wolff) was a sequence which retroactively affected the film's past sequence. All the careful placements of scare-tactics, seem to become a huge ritual towards a becoming. The cult seem to believe heavily that Charlie is a man's soul trapped in a woman's body. The ritual, in effect, became a wish-fulfillment on the part of Charlie. On the part of the cult, a revitalization of their organizational structure after years of having a non-male head figure.

The Witch (2015) concluded in the same manner of positively welcoming the Devil as an alternative. After a long struggle exorcising the devil off the walls of the family home, the family is executed in favor of the dark lord. The ritual in the end, however, is closer to Melies' magick than that of Anger's ridiculous spectacle. Which makes the witches more al-

luring. For *Hereditary*, the devil and the cult, as validated in the end as true, provided an exposure to the lapses of its world's psychological sciences which it contrasts. Beyond the frame, this trope seem to subvert the popular discourse heavily dependent on psychology without resorting back to a kind of individualism since the evil is outside one's body.

On *The Witch*, the alternative is an exit from the isolated family life towards a kind of communal lifestyle. Although, the alternative was not explored enough, it brought about a promise of newness, by exhibiting that they can fly with the help of their power. The alternative in this film is also only validated in the last instance, when all the crimes were already committed and is in the point of no coming back.

The Devil's alternative is neoliberalism's alternative: "they don't designate anything outside the mainstream culture."⁵ The Devil's otherness, as a political figure, became of interest on how it perfectly depicts the trickery of modern liberalism's promises of diversity and openness. At first, the Devil exposes you to things which are novel in the first look. But this novelty later crumbles as its form betrays its promises. The alternative reveals itself as

merely, a reaction. The Devil as an alternative do not even fall far from the “conceptual singularity,” as conflation of falseness.⁶

This allure for an alternative lifestyle, as compared with their specific contemporary, seem to be a kind of trickery. This allure came from a distance between the characters themselves and the Devil. The Devil appeared as other. The alternatives however, are retrogressive ones. In *Hereditary*, the radical project of the proto-cyborg soul-transfer, became a mere issue of fetishized obsession for a correct identity: for a search of a correct match for body and soul, and not of, say, cyborg fluidity. It is much worse in *The Witch*, wherein the alternative seem to reflect the hippie retreat towards a kind of primitivist new ageism: a rejection of the exploits of modern era for a past which is more regressive.

Beware of Satan

Thinking of Satan, the Devil, or whatever anyone calls him as an attractive conclusion with all its allure, is probably nowhere possible in the religious conservatism of Southeast Asia. If anything, films from Islamic regions

of Southeast Asia show a firmer rejection of the Devil's intrusion in the life of people. The recent remake of the Indonesian film *Satan's Slaves* (2017) and the newly released Malaysian film *Dukun* (2018) approach the triumph of the Devil as a metaphor for a speculative decline of Islamic faith in the modern world.

The Devil in the Islamic world is a familiar evil: he is out to get your kids. On both films, there are pacts made with the devil in exchange of having children. In return, the children must surrendered in the service of the Dark Lord which made their very existence possible in the human world. Resistance against the dark side is shown in the reinforcement of family values. At best, these are gestures for a conservative closure: a revival of Manichean narratives in the time when the religious moral absolutes are being tested.

Interestingly, this seems to be a continuation of resistance the families from *Hereditary* and *The Witch* made against the Devil, only in the instance of Islamic-leaning films, the resistance involves the religious institutions' guidance. In both *Satan's Slaves* and *Dukun*, the religious restorative approach always come with yet-to-be resolved contradictions,

wherein it is always a fight against the Devil with the help of an Imam. However, they have already fell from grace and the Imam can't do anything anymore. In both films, making it out of the guilt for a crime already done, is the recourse of the families as they already have turned their backs from Allah. They need to make it on their own.

It is in this instance of individual survival that a kind of cynicism were played into the narrative, although, still, trying to salvage the family towards the direction of holy salvation. *Satan's Slaves'* climax sequence saw the abandonment of the religious institution in the midst of the swarming of Satan's army. In the absence of God's representative, it is the father who struggled for their way out as a means to protect the family. In *Dukun*, defense lawyer Karim (Faizal Hussein) struggles as he try to find his missing daughter while juggling Diana's (Umie Aida) court case.

The abandonment of the religious figure or of God's representative is seen as a punishment for the weaknesses seen by the authority to its subjects. On both films, women are seen as either desperate seekers of wish-fulfillment, in the case of *Satan's Slaves*, or uncon-

trollable freaks who always acts on their own outside of what is allowed, as embodied by the witchdoctor, Diana in *Dukun*.

Both instances where the central characters of conflict are women, there are always two sides in the embodiment of women. First, the highly conservative ideology pervading the highly religious cultures of both countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, wherein the male are seen as bearers of the code of the law. Even those who are supposedly defiant figures on the film, like the former detective in *Dukun* who was removed from Diana's case because he pursued the paranormal leads, are still acting in the name of the greater code. The women's place in the narrative is either as a victim, the collaborator or the perpetrator. In a similar fashion, contemporary Hollywood and Islamic Southeast Asia depict the Devil as this intrusive, alien Other, who was then allowed in the household by the female. In *Satan's Slaves* it is the mother's desperation to have a child which allowed the Devil's spawn to be born. The same thread of narrative fall in *Dukun*, where Karim's missing daughter was offered to be the next medium to the Devil after the current medium dies, before she was

born. The Devil, let by the women to enter in our home, will turn the whole household upside down.

The other side of this depicts women as the total undermining of the name of the father. By being the uncontrollable freak, by being the witchdoctor, women as medians of the Devil were able to escape from the agony of oedipal reason, and completely construct a narrative outside of the structures of religion to expose the core function of the family in a highly conservative society: that women serve their function in the society to give birth to children who will serve a greater lord. The limit of exposition, however, is the undermining of the Lawful great lord was replaced only by the Lord of Darkness. Still caught in the chain of servitude for a great signifier.

The case, however, of Diana in *Dukun* presents a nuanced take. Diana, originally from Sumatra, is out to reclaim a history which was taken from them by the anti-insurgency witch-hunts of Soekarno. By being involved with an outlawed religion, Diana has no recourse but to live underground. In both films, we see the representatives of the Devil in sites of non-ideal life: living in a shanty in the

middle of a concrete jungle, or, a woman entertaining men in the red light district.

The symbolic victory of the Devil in both *Satan's Slaves* and *Dukun* do not really give off the same celebration as the Hollywood's take. The Devil's victory serves as a warning for the contemporary world. The devil might be residing at your favorite bar, or at your neighbor's.

What if Satan is one of us?

In the Philippines, recent takes on the Devil show a similar approach on his proximity with the aforementioned Southeast Asian films, only on an extreme. The Devil in recent Filipino films is closer than we thought: he/she might be inside of us. Scientist J.D. Bernal also abstracted the devil in the same sense of internalization, but he suggests addressing the devil outside of these abstractions.⁷ But, on the virtue, still, of the Devil being a liberal-conservative guilt machine, there's no way that the Devil in the context of permanent midnight be addressed through exteriority, much less be addressed scientifically. In recent Philippine Cinema, no one really likes to

exorcize the Devil. Philippine Cinema is itself a Vampire's Castle.⁸

On recent horror films, and there are quite a few, a consistency with depicting the devil as an extension of one's personality manifests a lot through what they are guilty of. *Seklusyon* (2016) offered the most obvious and most outspoken representation of this thought. The Devil in *Seklusyon* is thought by the Marcusean One-Dimensional man, in the embodiment of a woman and has arrived in the form of a religious icon. A Virgin Mary variation. Contrary to the usage in Islamic Southeast Asian Cinema, the Devil serves for the film as a kind of metaphoric statement against the Catholic Church's inconsistencies. What's consistent here is how the Devil in the film becomes the bearer of the ultimate truth, following the same thread of the auteurist ideologue of Erik Matti wherein the antagonists always have the last say for the truth. As if the ultimate truth, like he's been saying on one of his recent on-line statements, is the "evil inside of us."

Depicted in *Seklusyon* on the manner of how Catholic seminaries control one's worldly desire backfires and has produced more tenacious evil beings. It presents a cynical look at

the religious institution and less of an active critique. The film bears more of an ideological bias confirmation than to open an active conversation. Less of an effective statement than a generic rant that we have already heard.

Violator (2014) say the same thing as *Seklusyon* on a more personal scale. Here, the Devil echoes “personal demons” haunting the characters inside the precinct. In *Violator*, what is highlighted in its apocalypse is more of a continuation of a rainy day than of that Devil and the apocalypse as an encounter. Despite of the seemingly isolated cases of suicide in the film – which has presented a quite interesting premise on a kind of primitive response to an upcoming onslaught – the encounter with the Devil became a scapegoat on this: at last, we can have someone to blame.

These extreme internalizations can perhaps be seen symptomatically in the same vein as the first two regions in the world, but without a certain grand project. *Seklusyon* and *Violator*, while being made in the 21st century, seems to have left their view of things in the glory days of late 20th century where “flatness,” “depthlessness,” and “superficiality,” are quite well celebrated.⁹ But they are less formal

exercise than an imposition of ideology in the now “flat” signifier of the Devil. They both lack the abstraction of the concept which can make it deal with the Real. In the Gothic Flat-line and inside the Vampire’s Castle, the Devil becomes less of a metaphor than a substitute for being: the Devil as the simulacra of the self.¹⁰

In the three regions, we can see a similarity and differences between the ways they approach the Devil. New Hollywood celebrates the Devil in the same manner that they celebrate “diversity” in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). Islamic Southeast Asia still sees it as a threat, but as a threat to its status quo. Philippine Cinema seems to give up in trying to grasp the Devil. All are reactive, regressive, and pacifying. But what Philippine Cinema’s Devil can’t seem to get out of its system is how it still tries to desperately try to cling on to self-blaming. The Devil in contemporary Philippine Cinema seems to become an image of virtue calling for older values that neoliberalism turned its back on, against any form of seeming corruption which it also suggests that we accept.

Hypocrisy is the catchphrase of this liberal virtue calling. The Devil, most especially in

Seklusyon, is this representation of virtue calling which supposedly would expose hypocrisy. In another sense, the Devil in *Seklusyon* is a symptom of a unilateral thinking, like in most neoliberal virtue calling, it comes from an emotional outburst than from an intellectual inquiry. It is a non-critique which settles on founded values which are mostly regressive and reactionary. The Vampire's Castle is also a pressure group¹¹: it can't quite handle the very existence of contradictions, and so, pushes for what it thinks to be right riding on its moral high horse. The Vampire's Castle is actually conservative while trying to present itself as an alternative.

The Devil on the three instances, can be seen also in the same vein of the flatness. The endings of all the films mentioned went to this track: the recruitment into the coven on *Hereditary* and *The Witch*, the embodiment of the Devil in the Neighbor in *Dukun* and *Satan's Slaves*, and the "encounters" with the self in *Seklusyon* and *Violator*. Much as the Devil is itself malicious, the films themselves often rely on the controversy of the subject itself. Once you can sell the Devil, the rockstar image and the extreme enemy, it is easier to sell

its reverse strongly. And at most, it is really regressive thought that is sold by these films through the Devil.

LARUELLE'S HELL

Victims, Heroes and Thinking Non-Philosophy
in the Third-World.

The Problem of Thinking Non-Philosophy in the Third World

The third world, then and now, has been understood in the same manner as it was during the cold war. It has always been the other that's been left off from the war. As much as it is the other, it has also been the battlefield of subjectivizing wars between the first two worlds. Much of the third worlds are dominated by the one identifying in the first world. In response, people from the third world has responded against the occupation of the first world in deed and in dreams:

*I am colonized. I dream of decolonizing
 Myself and others. The images of the dream
 Do not match up. I am the body
 And the archive.*¹

The framework of the third world makes it hard for a non-philosophical thought. Heriberto Yépez' poem about himself as an author makes it clear: the images do not match up. The third world is an overdetermined subjectivation. The third world contains a large number of signification for it to be generalized.

Philosophers and media intellectuals helped to further develop this overdetermination. Third world studies at most, highlight the modes of resilience on these conditions of sub-servience by the first world. Celebrating multiplicity in culture: the coexistence of "indigenous" with the first world cultures are being heralded as resistance, whereas in practice, it is at most, a hostage taking. This tolerance for multiplicitist coexistence, tolerance for difference, are part of the mixture of the "partially indeterminate and transcendent" which denies any form of authentic "singularity" and conflates them to "conceptual singularities, blended with philosophical

representation.”²

Within the complex of multiplicist coexistence, modes of resistance is found inside, which is also, being tolerated by the ruling thought. The Philippines, as being considered for the third world, is no exemption from this. The problem in the Philippines has always been thought in the way its manifestation as a nation arrive: as an archipelago, the scope of thought should also be archipelagic, as placed by contemporary media intellectuals such as Nick Deocampo.³

As far as the traditions of thought are concerned, it seems like the third world never left the cold war. Two modes of thinking can be generalized from the Philippines: a dominant and a resistant thought. The dominant one, we say, is the one-dimensionality of liberal thought which espouses itself with “tolerance” and a kind of eternal “modus vivendi.”⁴ Deocampo’s rhizomatic thought is further developed under the liberal framework, to which he came up with what he claims as a “new” and “indigenous” framework of the “mangrovia.”⁵ His “new” framework merely echoes the necessity of liberal thought for negotiating between parties. On his concern,

that is, a point of negotiation between institutional thought and resistant thought. His thought is located at the point itself of negotiation. A lived *modus vivendi*: a kind of philosophical non-decision to further highlight the existence of difference.

The resistant thought is the insistence of dialectical and historical materialism at the site of liberal capitalism's symbolic victory. Laruelle might have a lot to disagree with using such framework of thought as the base of liberation. In his book *General Theory of the Victim*, he mentioned that dialectical thought would endanger the victim towards its "second murder."⁶ Laruelle is trying to salvage what he considers as the radical generic content of the victim to "rise up", a kind of futuristic messiah for himself who can save the victim from "continued victimization."⁷ However, his rising up came from a necessity of an approximation of a kind of "rational passivity" which "avoids reaction."⁸

Non-philosophy's conflict in the Philippines as a third world with the insistence of both liberal and dialectical/historical materialist thoughts, on top of any other mess of contradictions, constitute the "hell" that this

essay seeks to address. The concept of hell here is taken from Laruelle as one which is that of overdeterminations. Non-philosophy confronts overdetermination here not as a process of subjectivation, but a mode of living. As a point of making of a decision, this essay will look into the problem of thinking non-philosophy by processing it with dialectical materialism, as a response to Laruelle's critique of the second murder of the victim. I argue that, in the guise of Maoist dialectical materialism, there is a necessary withering of the identity of the victim, but not in the form of its murder. Contrary to what Laruelle states, Maoism do not "renegade" the victim, but rather, it positively withers its identity as a victim with towards an ontological transformation from one generic category to another. A movement from victim to something else. After all, it is Laruelle who suggested for the victim to be "awakened" to be saved from its continued victimization.

Laruelle's Hell

Laruelle's concept of hell is of an overdetermined condition. One which "denote[s] the

growing and permanent extortion of a surplus-value of communication, of speed and of urgency in change, in productivity and in work, in the pressure of images and slogans,” on top, if not, more advanced than capital would ever do.⁹ These transcoding of conditions of Man is what non-philosophy fears, if not, tries to avoid. Man-in-person, as a project necessitates it to be underdetermined. But under conditions of overdetermination, of *always-alreadyness*, what would become of non-philosophy?

Such hell is experienced in the third world. The third world as overdetermined hell sustains itself through a permanence of crisis. On areas of conflict, Hito Steyerl identified stasis as the unresolution and dragging on of wars. In the permanence of crisis, capital still plays a major role in the prolongation of its stasis. “Conflict” deterritorialized from the dialectical process, is now “not a means to force a resolution of a disputed situation, but a tool to sustain it.”¹⁰ In the third world as overdetermined hell, the “little list that the Contemporaries established” of the qualities of hell are existing side by side, regardless of its contradictory character. Or perhaps, there really is a

unilaterality with the thought of media intellectuals outside of the third world.

Unilaterality in the third world, especially in the Philippines, came from the seemingly non-contradictory complementariness of class war and post-class economics (or an economics which denies class exploitation). Of material exploitation and expropriation of labor and immaterial modes of production. Of Imperialism, Bureaucrat (financial, psychopolitical) capitalism and feudalism. Of the persistence of history through historical epic movies and the end of history. Of backward industrial complexes, wide feudal farm lands, and hyperconnected cybernetic employee outsourcing centers. Of renaissance romanticism, millenarianism, folk-animism, new age and post-modernism. These of course, do not really concern the human, or the Laruellian Man-in-person. But as lived experience, the people caught in the crossfire of ideologies and ideologues necessarily becomes overdetermined by these. Thus, thinking the Man-in-person in an overdetermined condition becomes, whether Laruelle likes it or not, its primary aspect of contradiction which must be cleared before the people's war be thought

non-philosophically. The Philippines as a mess, as a Laruellian hell, is also Laruelle's non-philosophy's hell.

Heroes from Hell

Overdetermination, in the last instance, determines the mode of struggle in the third world. Underdetermination, in this sense, is still a yet to be thought praxis. Non-philosophy, then, becomes the thought for the not-so-near-future. Guided by the necessity of the current conditions of struggle, Philosopher from hell Domingo Castro de Guzman wrote decades ago:

“Let the most far-reaching visions of society be formulated as they arise in the head of the theoretical worker; if they belong to the far future, then they have to wait; and that they have to wait means that they are not as yet that important to the people, and therefore, not as yet that true. A future truth is to that extent quite still false. The truest truth is never an inch ahead

of that living symbiosis between theoretical practice and practical practice which is the people's struggle itself."¹¹

The Philippines is still philosophical, is still theosophical, still hermeneutical. To echo Deleuze and Guattari, interpretation is still the Philippines' "way of believing and of being pious."¹² Or at least of its intellectuals. Anti-poet and critic, Edel Garcellano addressed this still pervasive belief of divine readings of history: on the debates arising after 1987's EDSA Drama (to use Edel Garcellano's term), he noted that history on the side of the interpretative approach abstracted human destiny "towards the theological, epiphenomenological [sic], the occult manifesting the Supreme Order, the Divine Form, the Verities" which would "insist on the workings of the Hand of God" as the rule of thumb of every movements in history.¹³

The dominance of hermeneutics in the sourcing of meaning brings about a necessity for messianic figures to stand in-place of the insurrections: heroes. Divinities in this kind of hell summons from a symbolic Asgard mes-

sianic figures. Heroes as gods and messengers of gods are a common theme in Philippine literature (whether from mythical or historical writings). But a new figure of heroes are being introduced in the time of intensification of contradictions: the figure of a dying hero.

The death of the hero, as film director Jerrold Tarog would suggest, places the hero back to his “humanity.”¹⁴ This humanity that Tarog is pointing out, as depicted in the films *General Luna* (2015) and *Goyo: The Boy General* (2018) which he helped produce as its director, is, of course, isn’t the generic humanity as the “human subject of the human sciences,”¹⁵ or not, as Reza Negarestani put it, in the “distinction between sentience as a strongly biological and natural category and sapience as a rational... subject.”¹⁶ This is humanity in its overdetermination of various elements which assists the production of the images which conjure the desired “humanity” of the films’ creators.

Humanity here has become a victim in itself. Being overdetermined, humanity became under siege by the elements which sets its overdeterminations. Overdeterminations, of course, are a product of philosophizing. If we take what Tarog has said with a grain of

salt, it is to assume that his films thinks of, for example, General Antonio Luna's or President Emilio Aguinaldo's humanity philosophically through its criticality. The film, *General Luna* "struggle[s] against [the concept of man] universally and by every means possible." In effect, it "destroy[ed] not only humanism but man himself."¹⁷ This destruction however, isn't towards the positive (or "negative" if we take it non-philosophically) destruction which leads towards a rift to look into the future. This is mainly a destruction towards non-being. Not nothing: the reduction from hero to "human" in the film *General Luna*, came with a tinge of cynicism, by which, the radicality of human, the man-in-person or the victim, is undermined by the film's fascination of the "human" at the expense of the death of the hero.

Humans here, in the cinematic universe Tarog and TBA are trying to create, are un-heroes. The TBA un-hero took off a negative metaphysics, which, as mentioned earlier, brought to the destruction of man himself.¹⁸ What then has become of the knowledge to be gained from the radical figure of man, the man-in-person, which the un-hero destroyed? This knowledge, measured in the

negative metaphysicians' cynicism, are also destroyed along with man. It is in this instance that the hero, in the repeating image of the dying hero, the un-hero, has become the exposed matter which overdetermine[s] the anti-values of negative metaphysics (its cynicism, first and foremost, or worse, as de Guzman would put it, its nihilism). Tarog and TBA then, in this instance, can now be generalized as *media intellectuals*. The dying hero is an investment, perhaps, its image well become a signifier to replace the victim.

From Victims to Rebels: Thinking of the Future through a Philo-Fiction

The figure of the Divine and the structures which involves it overdetermines the Philippines as third world hell. It is also what shapes the resistance. Much as the Philippines is still dependent on hermeneutic reading; the mode of struggle then, is still dependent on dialectical materialism. The tactics laid upon the struggle towards waging the people's war were based on the acknowledgement of the following contradictions addressed by Jose Maria Sison on the cadres and communist

party members:

“To gain a comprehensive understanding of the specific characteristics of our people’s war, we must consider such specific conditions as that our people’s war is in line with the national democratic revolution of a new type; that we need to wage a protracted war in the countryside; that we are fighting in a mountainous archipelago; that the enemy is big and strong while we are still small and weak; that a fascist dictatorship has arisen amidst a political and economic crisis of the ruling system; that the country is dominated by one imperialist power and thus there is a unified armed reaction, except in south-western Mindanao; and that US imperialism is on the decline in Asia and throughout the world and world revolution is advancing amidst the general crisis of the world capitalist system unprecedented

since the end of World War II.”¹⁹

These conditions are set in 1974. The conditions of hell (fascist dictatorship, crises, imperialism) are generically the same as it is now, only intensified quantitatively and qualitatively.

The characteristics defined above, of the People’s War, sets the programs moving forward for the deterritorialization of the conditions of hell, until hell becomes an impossibility. Such a huge task will fail if taken generically. People’s war is a war which is waged that is dependent on specificities as the backbone of its tactics: from the specifics of overdetermined realities (of class, world and local economics, military might, culture) to the specifics of the overdeterminations themselves.

Thinking the People’s War generically, in light of non-philosophy, can only agree on some points of reference. Non-philosophy can be useful on pointing out the generic character of the people as Man-in-person, or as the victim: the victim which is “capable of rising up and of bringing about the transformation of an object or an event of the world.”²⁰

But, in the nature of thought of the people's struggle, of dialectical materialism, the victim here is thought in its specificity: the victim in the process of rising up can no longer be the victim once it risen up. The people as victim is thought here, dialectically, already in its transformation: from the victim towards its rising up as the Rebel.

Laruelle concluded that to be able to break "the specular circle of the victim and the intellectual [...] the intellectual must assume the victim in the victim's own way."²¹ Generically, if placed in the condition of man-in-person, the intellectual himself is a victim, or at least, the victim-in-person. The assumption of the position, to break with the cycle, must resolve into a transformation, which converts both, the intellectual and the victim, towards being the Rebel. This process, of simultaneously becoming the Rebel, is called solidarity.

The Rebel is up against the Divine, being a resident from Hell. As observed in the current gains of the people's war, however, the future of the rebellion against the divine is not contained in what Laruelle calls the "rediscovery of contemporary post-Marxist gnosis"²² but in its reversal: on the establishment of post-

gnostic Marxist (Leninist-Maoist) economy. Dialectically, of course, history, upon clearing the course of what causes its stasis, will be pushed towards another phase (whether it be post-Marxist, non-philosophical, post-philosophical) but that is what's the future to come. For now, clearer is the non-philosophical project, that is, making a tabula rasa of the future, as an attractive alternative thought. But as de Guzman clarified, the tabula rasa future is still for a far future, which can just be thought as thought for now.

KILLING FIELDS OF VISION

or why this culture of love
needs a bullet in the face

o

On his Afterword to the Second Edition of *Capital*, Karl Marx noted the necessary task to make sense of Hegel's system of dialectics, which, according to him is "standing on its head" and "must be turned right side up again," that is, on its feet, for it to be relevant to one's material experience. Such is the violence needed to lead an idea to a more radical field. To text, after all, is to enter a warzone.

Garcellano writing in 1992: "Critiquing is not a supplement to writing: writing is critiquing." The critic, therefore, has to be more than armed in the shoot-out. After all, his task to

critique is already overdetermined. The first impulse, then, of any critic who is worth his/her salt must be to stop, think, and combat all comforts of laziness of formalism and romanticism and stick to fleshing out the meaning of a piece. Film critics shouldn't be an exemption. Every contradiction is overdetermined: you're not in the warzone because you want to anyway, but because of a necessity – for those who write, it's always the necessity of History, a war against forgetting. In the field of battle, you guide your weapon with your brain, eye and your hand, and not with your penis (real or imaginary). Be wary of those who tell you to follow your heart. There is something wrong with someone who loves shooting their guns out of impulse or desire.

I

Load your barrels: wave of zombies are approaching.

Connoisseurs and critics swarm into facebook and love-posts on the new feudal-compradore sponsored romance film! Proclaiming love as universal and alcohol is always good for you.

Of course, you should try weed too, they say.
Never forget the mandatory #feels.

Of course, #feels never really equate what
love is.

The articulation of themes of the affect, or
of love, pain, happiness — in our cinema (or
probably on any art form that there is) seem
to always come with the assumption that such
themes are universal — that only such themes
are human. It's as if the very "immateriality",
so to say, of such works validates its status of
"high art."

But feelings can never be pure, and no one is
innocent.

One's affect that is articulated in an art pro-
duction would always have an intention: to
express its care to whom this feeling is for. But
to dedicate a piece solely for this feeling is an-
other thing: this is nothing but decadence.

As if having zombies as your seatmate in cin-
ema isn't enough, what you have are decadent
zombies getting off either from their fleeting

feelings or their sadomasochism. (This is liberation! Says the libertarian! – just notify him that libertarianism is already dead, and so is he.)

2

For how long are we going to pretend that it is the soul we are concerned while rendering our computer-generated, hurtful semi-autobiography over cups of overpriced frappuccino? Are we to be just meant to be cartographers of our own caffeine-drunk feelings? What can we learn then on tracing these froth geographies?

What can we get by answering if we lived the pain in that certain place?

How is it that one finds enough energy to go through the labor of countless screenplay draft, assemble a production team, to create takes and retakes, and be awake over sleepless post-production only to exhibit one's articulation of love-pain (of a very personal one, that is), dedicate it to an audience who never even asked for it and take pleasures from it?

Doesn't anyone find this sadomasochism sickening? What we are witnessing recently are series of pornographies meant to cater only one: its filmmaker. Oh, how we love reliving our heartbreak projected in 4k UHD.

3

There's heartbreak, then there's grief.

Death is affecting, even in film. When one is trying to make amends over (a loved) one's death in film, it seems to come deep into the very core of one's person that its maker tends to forget that exhibition comes after post-production. Everyone and everything outside the filmmaker and the film's subject become irrelevant. Very personal films which tries to showcase one's articulation of grief, in effect, becomes an imposition of this very feeling to its audience to the point that one must veer away from being critical while it actively tries to seek (unconsciously) for acceptance and understanding. Personal filmmaking at its most tyrannical: such films bring more silence than discourse.

4

Representation of gender, minorities and other identities in these films are being reduced into mere narrative devices. The gaze of the maker might be of that specific identity, but devoid of any form of any radical intent: just mere representation. But, is this representation really enough? Those in the academe, who would rather read them, deconstruct them to justify these representations, are the same to those who champion pride parades but never really live and understand any real struggle.

These filmmakers and academics are no longer your comrade in arms, but rather, mere opportunists who uses feminist or queer rhetoric for their own profit.

5

But, the theater is a privileged space: especially now more than ever. Our mentors, who taught us that the digital medium would liberate us, have failed and will continue to fail us while still blindly believing in its supposed

liberation and having dinner with those who imprisoned cinema for more than a century now.

This continuing imprisonment of cinematic spaces has legitimized more of these so-called “personal” films to be produced. It’s as if the mere production of such decadence isn’t enough, rhetoric of supposedly progressive representation has been utilized by its proponents to legitimize their existence in the so called “independent” (this term, too, is in question) scene. The “regional” (in relation to the Manilacentric ideologue) has become mere backdrop of stories endemic to products manufactured by the corporate cinema-complex, and the non-Tagalog/non-English speech as mere aesthetic.



However, if there is anything that the age of digital production/reproduction has enabled us, it is to re-validate Walter Benjamin when he said that back in the age of mechanical reproduction, in which the concept of authen-

ticity ceases to be applicable, “the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual [that is, every articulation of metaphysical such as the divine and the soul], it begins to be based on another practice – politics.” It is not an accident that the speed in which we expose one’s artists’ ideological inclination is now just relative to your internet connection. For what is this insistence of love as universal but rhetoric of the bourgeoisie (coming after Jameson): this plea for love and understanding of pain in time of wide and still widening gap between those who have and those who have-not is their denial of this very condition not because they shut their eyes off it, but because they see it very clear and see nothing wrong about it from where they stand in privilege. “These are the nature of things,” they claim.

The text, the killing field of vision, is where this assumption of “nature” needs to be interrogated. For this “nature” is but another determination. And the war rages on, determination after determination. Words are meant as bullets to burst open the brains and innards of the image and the words – to reveal in their spilled guts what have they been eating for

breakfast.

Shoot at the drunkards' face first. Those who
drink at their posts deserve it anyway.

NOTES

The Years of Permanent Midnight

1. A short film directed by then film-student, Clare del Rosario, and written by Carlo Cielo. The film was shot as partial fulfillment of Del Rosario's Film Directing class. The film was first screened at the Annual Black Beret Competition at the UPFI Film Center in 2014.
2. George Ritzer, "Introduction," in *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 16.
3. Lisandro Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in the 20th Century* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 150.
4. "...openness makes liberalism the product of governance... an openness to dissent and the willingness to compromise..." "Liberalism [is] a fleeting concept that operates more as a blue-print than as an ideology[...]; "...liberalism does not have steady friends or foes, it is because it negotiates those categories through constant praxis." Claudio, *Liberalism and the Post-colony*, 2-3.
5. This was, for him, embodied by the existence of Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival and its emphasis on "narrative, continuity [and] suture," similar to the focus of Hollywood. See Rolando Tolentino, *Indie Cinema at mga Sanaysay sa Topograpiya ng Pelikula sa Filipinas*, (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2016), 15.
6. Kojin Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics: on Kant and Freud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.
7. Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 4.
8. Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 22.

9. See Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*
10. Jonathan Beller, *Acquiring Eyes: Philippine Visuality, Nationalist Struggle and the World-Media System* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2006), 7.
11. Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, OH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 38.
12. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, 291.
13. The argument over the materiality of ideology through its "exist[ence] in an apparatus and the practice or practices of that apparatus" marks the radical break of Althusserian theory of ideology from the conception of Marx in *The German Ideology*. See Louis Althusser, *On The Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014), 184.
14. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 16.
15. The unbound seriality is "is exemplified by such open-to-the-world plurals as nationalists, anarchists, bureaucrats and workers. It is the seriality which makes the United Nations a normal, wholly unparadoxical institution." Bound seriality, on the other hand, "is exemplified by finite series like Asian-Americans, heurs, and Tutsis. It is the seriality that makes a United Ethnicities and United Identities unthinkable." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 29.
16. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 243.
17. Beller, *Acquiring Eyes*, 2.
18. Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 22.
19. "Pick-up Lines and Hugot: pop-culture phenomena against the back drop of Philippine Base and Superstructure," Unpublished, 2017.
20. Jean Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Appendix I: Cinema/ Ideology/Criticism." in Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cinema Against Spec-*

tacle (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 255.

21. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, 219.

22. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, 220.

23. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, 219.

24. I've made a longer note on *I'm Drunk, I Love You* on my blog:
<<https://missingcodec.wordpress.com/2017/08/23/two-ways-of-alienation/>>

25. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Hants: Zero Books, 2009), 4.

26. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 5.

27. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 6.

28. Edel Garcellano, *Intertext* (Quezon City: Kalikasan Press, 1991), 58.

29. For Engels' discussion of Ideology, refer to: Engels, Friedrich. "Engels to Franz Mehring." *Marx/Engels Collected Works Vol. 50. 1892-95 Letters*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2004. 163-167.

30. Peter Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 6.

31. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (The Essential Zizek Edition) (London, Verso: 2008), 25-26.

32. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 9.

33. Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony*, 151.

34. Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony*, 4.

35. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 26.

36. Micheal Neu, *Just Liberal Violence* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 100.

37. Ibid.

38. Neu, *Just Liberal Violence*, 99.

39. Mark Fisher, "Good For Nothing" in *The Fisher-Function*. (London: [egress], 2017), 40.

40. Nick Dunn, *Dark Matters: A Manifesto for the Nocturnal City*, (Hants: Zero Books, 2016).

41. Beller, *Acquiring Eyes*, 5.

42. See Tolentino, *Indie Cinema*, 4.

43. "Digital is liberation theology. Now we can have our own media. The internet is so free, the camera is so free. The issue is not anymore that you cannot shoot. You have a Southeast Independent Cinema now. We have been deprived for a long time, we have been neglected, we have been dismissed by the Western media. That was because of production logistics. We did not have money, we did not have cameras, all those things. Now, these questions have been answered. We are on equal terms now. Now there are new people who are doing these very different things, such as Raya Martin, John Torres, or Khavn de la Cruz in the Philippines." See Tilman Baumgartel, "Digital is Liberation Theology: an interview with Lav Diaz" in *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, ed. Tilman Baumgartel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 177.

44. Khavn dela Cruz, "Four Manifestos" in *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, ed. Tilman Baumgartel, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 122.

45. "Roughly ten years ago, give or take, independent cinema was punk rock (or hip-hop) for filmmakers, with the same energy, the same sense of adventurism, the same love for new forms, the same fervor for cross-pollination, the same carte blanche, the same economic freedom, the same disregard for gatekeepers, who were eventually cast out as their counter parts around the world." Eduardo Dayao. "Sleeping with the Enemy." *Kino Punch*. Iss. 3. (2015).

46. Tolentino, *Indie Cinema*, 5. Also, Tolentino will further stress that the major contributing factor for the mainstream appropriation of the digital medium is Cinemalaya's emphasis for the development of "mainstream look" for independent pro-

ductions which stresses on “narrative, continuity and suture,” similar to classical Hollywood narrative films. (See Tolentino, *Indie Cinema*, 15)

47. “SM Cinemas goes full digital.” *The Philippine Star*. August 27, 2012 <<http://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2012/08/27/842405/sm-cinema-goes-full-digital>>

48. FDIs increased from \$11.77 B (2005-2010) to \$20.42 B (2011-2015) while IT-BPO revenues increased to more than 200% as compared with its revenue before the Aquino administration. Invalid source specified. “Achievements of the Aquino Administration 2010-2016” <https://archive.org/download/daang-matuwid/Achievements%20under%20Aquino%20Admin_160616.pdf>

49. Elizabeth Marcelo: “Kayo na po ang magkumpara sa pagkakaiba. Dati walang nakikisama sa proyekto ngayon nag-uunahan na ang mga pribadong kumpanya at nagbibigay ng premium,” Aquino said. “PNoy cites PPP projects as proof of confidence in his administration” *GMA News Online*, July 28, 2015. <<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/529626/pnoy-cites-ppp-projects-as-proof-of-confidence-in-his-administration/story/>>

50. Aquino said that while before, the government has to offer numerous fiscal incentives to attract companies to enter into a PPP deal with the government, now, private firms are the ones offering premiums to the government in order to secure PPP projects. “PNoy cites PPP projects as proof of confidence in his administration” *GMA News Online*, July 28, 2015

51. TBA is an abbreviation for three production companies it represents: Tuko Film Productions owned by real-estate comprador Fernando Ortigas, Buchi Boy Films owned by film producer and actor Eduardo A. Rocha, and Artikulo Uno, also owned by Ortigas.

52. Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, (Manila:

Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2006 [1970]), 64.

53. "Intensify the Offensives on a National Scale to Advance the People's Democratic Revolution," *Ang Bayan*, March 30, 2015.

54. "Elitist politics and economics: the real Aquino legacy," *IBON Foundation*, July 1, 2016. <<http://ibon.org/2016/07/elitist-politics-and-economics-the-real-aquino-legacy/>>

Against Happiness

1. For the complimentary radio ad for this campaign, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxWp_S1dPbE

2. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 45.

3. Byung-chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (London, Verso, 2017), 45.

4. Mark Fisher, "Good for Nothing" from *The Fisher-Function* (London: [egress], 2017), 40.

5. Karl Marx, "Capital Vol. 1" from *Marx/Engels Collected Works* Vol. 35, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 241.

6. Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (London: Verso, 2017).

7. Byung-chul Han, *Psychopolitics*, 29.

8. Byung-chul Han, *Psychopolitics*, 30.

9. Hito Steyerl, "Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries" from *The Wretched of the Screen*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 126.

10. Byung-chul Han, *Psychopolitics*, 32.

11. Nick Land, "Machinic Desire," from *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, (Falmouth, UK & New York: Urbanomic & Sequence Press, 2011), 330.

Discomfort and the End of Experimentation

1. Khavn's response to Cinema Evaluation Board's assessment

of *Balangiga: Howling Wilderness*: “I’m a simple man. When I call something experimental, it is. In fact, I live-scored my 13-hour film “*Simulacrum Tremendum*” in the International Film Festival Rotterdam - IFFR for 13 hours non-stop to set a world record. That is experimental and extreme.” <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1901380226596607&set=a.198079400260040>>

2. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Hants, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 4.

3. Patrick Campos, *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century*, (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016), 498-499.

4. “The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, [...] it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’. [...] the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author.” Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” from *Image, Music Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-143.

5. Taking generally to cinematic “experimentations” what Reza Negarestani commented on Nick Land’s writing: “Well, take for instance François Laruelle and Nick Land, fundamentally different thinkers and writers. Without questioning or doubting the merits of Laruelle’s work, I think there is a cognitive lesson to be learned here. Once you almost flatten the distinction between content and form, once you unwittingly develop an increasingly esoteric style, then you inevitably open yourself to reappropriation by the most dubious sects. Save for some glaring exceptions, Laruelle’s thought has been hijacked by new age mysticism, politically-motivated negative theology, and colonial pessimism masqueraded as the voice of decolonial emancipation. Land on the other hand is a self-conscious styl-

ist. His industriously crafted libidinal prose is less a product of a harbinger of semantic apocalypse who wages an all-out war against meaning (or inadvertent stylistic overexcitement) than it is a mundane yet effective mobilization of style to recruit the impressionable and those who are tired, rightly so, by stale and intellectually frustrating philosophy. But beneath the facade of this titillating, libidinally charged, and insinuating prose lies a philosophically and politically conservative writer, whose ideas of cybernetics and complexity hasn't advanced since the 1970s, whose brand of social Darwinism as cosmological laws can be effectively debunked by an undergraduate in physics, and whose idea of the will-to-think is no more than mere a lacquer over petty psychological fixations." Reza Negarestani and Fabio Gironi, "Engineering The World, Crafting the Mind: A Conversation with Reza Negarestani" from *Nero Editions*. 2018. <<https://www.neroeditions.com/docs/reza-negarestani-engineering-the-world-crafting-the-mind/>>

6. Slogan of 2018 Cinema Rehiyon, which was launched at the capital, Dystopian Manila.

7. Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, (London: Verso, 2017), 175.

Surrendering Ourselves to the Dark Lord

1. CCRU, "Rhythmic Practices". <<https://web.archive.org/web/20061026005707/http://www.ccru.net:80/archive/rhythmicsys.htm>>

2. "Gothic flatline: a plane where it is no longer possible to differentiate the animate from the inanimate and where to have agency is not necessarily to be alive." Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction* (New York: exmilitary, 2018), 2.

3. Patti Maguire Armstrong, "The Devil is Out of the Closet and

is a Liberal," *Catholic Stand*, <<http://www.catholicstand.com/the-devil-is-out-of-the-closet/>>

4. Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 25.

5. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Hants: Zero Books, 2009), 9.

6. "'singularities', 'multiplicities' and 'differences' [...] are mixtures of [...] false identities and of true generalities, partially indeterminate and transcendent, which deny the real authentic 'singularity.'" Francois Laruelle, *The Theory of Identities*, Trans. Alyosha Edlebi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

7. "the existence of hope in a society at any time itself depends on many unexplored psychological, economic and political causes. I do not think that the factors involved are of a mystical order, but that they require considerable disentangling." J. D. Bernal, *The World, The Flesh and the Devil: an Enquiry into the Future of the Three Enemies of the Rational Soul*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Traubner & Co., Ltd., 1929), 63.

8. "The Vampires' Castle specialises in propagating guilt. It is driven by a priest's desire to excommunicate and condemn, an academic-pedant's desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a hipster's desire to be one of the in-crowd." Mark Fisher, "Exiting the Vampire's Castle," *Open Democracy UK*, 24 November 2013. <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/mark-fisher/exiting-vampire-castle>>

9. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 1991), 9.

10. "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes." Jean Baudril-

lard, "Simulacra and Simulations," from *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 167.

11. "A left that does not have class at its core can only be a liberal pressure group.", Fisher, "Exiting the Vampire's Castle" Well, obviously, I don't really consider Philippine Cinema as anything leftist. I'm merely referring to how is the "alternative" and the "indie" pose in a kind of "leftist" position, a contra-status quo, which in practice, they are not.

Laruelle's Hell

1. Heriberto Yepez, "About Me: in English" from Two Poems by Heriberto Yepez. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3413-two-poems-by-heriberto-yepez>

2. Francois Laruelle, *Theory of Identities*. Trans. Alyosha Edlebi. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

3. Deocampo presented in a congress sometime in 2018 his proposal of rethinking Philippine film history in a "rhizomatic" manner.

4. Lisandro Claudio identified these two as the two faces of liberalism. Lisandro Claudio, *Liberalism and the Postcolony: Thinking the State in the 21st Century*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017), 4-5.

5. Deocampo has been introducing his alternative nativist model to the rhizome, which took inspiration to the mangrove as a structure of middle. The model was introduced on different occasions but there's yet to have a proper exposition of the model.

6. Francois Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*. Trans. Jessie Hock and Alex Dubilet, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 39.

7. Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 43.

8. Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 49.

9. Francois Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia and the End Times of Philosophy*, Trans. Drew S. Burk & Anthony Paul Smith, (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 16-17.
10. Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, (London: Verso, 2017), 3.
11. Domingo Castro de Guzman, "Editorial: The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory," *Journal of Social History* Vol 1, no. 2, 1989, iv.
12. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 171.
13. Edel Garcellano, *First Person, Plural: Essays* (Quezon City: Edel E. Garcellano, 1987), 25.
14. This notion came from a Twitter question asked to him by another user. The user inquired why in his film *Goyo: The Boy General* (2018), the titular character, Gen. Gregorio Del Pilar, was not introduced with his personal background fully exposed. He answered: "If I started the story in the film from his childhood until he become a general, it will be a story of a human who becomes a hero. While, when I started it from him as a general to his death, it became a story of a hero who becomes human." (Translation mine) <<https://twitter.com/JerroldTarog/status/1043706034475261952>>
15. Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia and the End Times of Philosophy*, 62.
16. Reza Negarestani, "The Labor of the Inhuman" from #ACCELERATE: *The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. Robin McKay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth, UK: Urbanomic, 2014), 431.
17. Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 15.
18. Sharing sentiments with Laruelle against philosophers, De Guzman noted this passage about negative metaphysics: "Negative metaphysics, which in the ultimate analysis must lead to nihilism has for one of its main theses and themes the so-called

de-struction or de-construction of the subject itself. It is thus led to avow and supposedly demonstrate the impossibility of any form of presence whatsoever. The rejection of God or of any form of divine Logos or Reason which only the most naive will discountenance, thereby ends up with the rejection of man itself (hence the anti-humanism of Heidegger and Derrida) in its entirety, not merely man in its humanistic distortion but man as animal self or as bodyself and all the possibilities that could derive from the latter. If the self as a mode of presence is impossible, then meaning, knowledge, truth are impossible. The abyss (which as we shall see is but the other name of God) reigns supreme in heaven and on earth and its infantile prophets, the theologians of the Nothing, the nihilists, which is to say, the philosophers.” Domingo Castro de Guzman, *Praxis and Philosophy* (Manila: Kalikasan Press, 1990), 165.

It is important to note, however, that de Guzman here is trying to salvage God or the divine Logos as instance of truth since he's still processing at this point a kind of “psychoanalysis of philosophy.”

19. Jose Maria Sison, “Specific Characteristics of our People's War,” from *Selected Writings of Jose Marie Sison 1968-1991: Building Strength through Struggle (1972-1977)*, (Utrecht & Quezon City: International Network for Philippine Studies & Aklat ng Bayan, Inc., 2013), 180.

20. Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 39.

21. Laruelle, *General Theory of Victims*, 63.

22. Laruelle, *Struggle, Utopia and the End Times of Philosophy*, 189.

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